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Adventure

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by MERLE CONSTINER

ONLY THE VALIANT
by JAMES NORMAN

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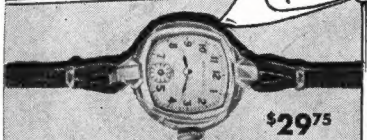

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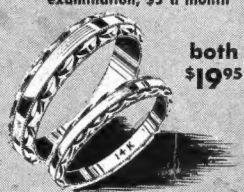

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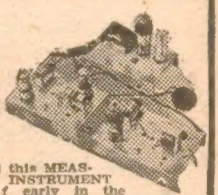

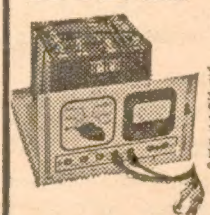

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Adventure
(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 110, No. 2 for Best of New Stories
December, 1943

NOVELETTES

Only the Valiant (a Davie Coster story) . . . . . JAMES NORMAN 38

Colonel Monzón, that model of all a military man should be, thought a campaign could be waged in only one way—according to the book—and that it took an army to fight a war. But that was before he met Coster, who'd marched with the *Brigades Internacionales*, and listened to a dead man singing in the Spanish mountains.

Killer Ship . . . . . BRIAN O'BRIEN 86

Any sensible 160-ton ship, wallowing alone through the seas southwest of Valpo, would scuttle for safety when badgered by enemy subs—but not the *Condor*. After all wasn't she a killer craft, her job the stalking of the wiliest monsters of the deep? Whale or U-boat—either was fair game to Captain Jens and his crew—just so much ocean loot to haul to the flensing deck and butcher.

SHORT STORIES

No Chance to Be a Hero . . . . . STANLEY C. VICKERS 33

Weather was all John Gaffney knew or cared about. He'd been drinking it in all his life like some men guzzle brandy and now he was going on a real bender—satisfying the urge he'd always had to sit in the low pressure center of a hurricane.

Accident Report . . . . . BILL GULICK 70

Every power company has a rule that says you should always treat a wire as hot if you have any doubts about it. I guess Texas didn't have any doubts for he didn't use the hot-wire cutters, just leaned out and cut it with his pliers—and the stuff hit him hard. I put it all in my report later and made everybody happy—even poor Tex.

From the Up-Wind Side . . . . . JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT 78

"If I was a duck," Cap'n Willie mused, "I'd fly *with* the wind—sort of coast along and let the wind do the work. Not so a duck. He'll bore straight into the wind, nine times out of ten. Bascom knows that—that's why he's a good warden—and that's why he got Milly and why Ed Lancaster collected twenty years in the pen."

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your *Adventure* may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

—The Publishers.

BE OUT ON DECEMBER 10TH ◆ ◆ ◆

Made in America . . . . . MAURICE BEAM 149

Five years of flying with the Luftwaffe had taught von Gunde a lot but he'd missed out somehow on the finer points of American humor. Now he was having his first lesson and he didn't like it. They joked about everything, it seemed, even when they were in deadly earnest.

SERIALS

Where Nests the Water-Snake (1st of 3 parts) . . MERLE CONSTINER 10

Down the river slid the *Morning Star* of Memphis and keeping pace with her erratic course along the backroads that paralleled the stream rode King Bodette on his sorrel mare. The craft's strange deckload of cornstalks interested the rider almost as much as the contents of his silver-trimmed saddle-bags would have intrigued the stern-wheeler's crew, for both were stolen goods. And both held the key to the murder maze that wound to the water-snake's nest.

Sharper Than the Sword (Conclusion) . . . . . GEORGES SURDEZ 112

After two years Lieutenant Barret—now Flying Officer Barret, R.A.F.—returns to France when he bails out of his blazing British bomber. The ex-French flyer, hunted across his homeland like a beast by the Nazi invader, seeks refuge in the chateau of his old commander and learns, as he watches Major Agnadel lose his soul, what things are sharper than any sword.

THE FACT STORY

The Myth of Calamity Jane . . . . . BRUCE NELSON 108

Modern authors and Hollywood scenario scribes have perpetuated her legend until, today, she is a heroic figure in the pageant of our Western folk-lore. But the true story of her life is only a drab caricature of the glamorous career invented by herself and supplemented by numerous romantic hack-writers.

VERSE

Basic Diet . . . . . FLORENCE BURRILL JACOBS 69

The States, you might say, were raised upon pioneer git-up-and-git . . . and corn.

DEPARTMENTS

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Kenneth S. White, Editor

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THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

THE author of "Where Nests the Water-Snake" has been capturing our attention for a good many years with his amusing and unconventional detective stories and we are delighted to have his first venture into another type of fiction mark also his first appearance on *Adventure's* contents page. Merle Constiner introduces himself and his picaresque tale thuswise—

Hand cupped to ear, I've stood back in the shadows at the edge of the clearing and eavesdropped many a lively *Camp-Fire* session—but speaking up is a different story.

(As the majority of writers must say:) I don't know what I can tell the circle about myself that might be interesting. Maybe I'd better tackle the subject from an oblique angle and talk a little first about the yarn itself.

The eighteen thirties and forties are extremely active years and I found the construction of "Where Nests the Water-Snake" to be pretty absorbing. In familiarizing myself with a detailed background, I used, in the main, such sources as contemporary texts, diaries, and commentaries. I learned a lot of things. I learned that the maxim about there being nothing new under the sun was more truth than prosody. In the middle eighteen-thirties, for example, folks used such current expressions as 'the darned fool' and 'It left me flat' and referred to their transatlantic passenger vessels as 'floating palaces'. The citizens of that era weren't much different from the citizens of today; a little nearer the scalplock, maybe, and with a rather pronounced weakness for public cowhidings, a rather pardonable pride in the duelling-ground out behind the old slaughterhouse, and an enthusiasm for the public consumption of wine by the pipe.

It's rather difficult getting good down-to-earth material on the period. There was a halo around *belles lettres* in those days of restricted penmanship and the super-elegant influence of gentility seeped into such common records as letters and diaries and commentaries. The rugged things of life, tavern brawls, mail robberies, murders, and the like, were mentioned as briefly as possible and with as much verbal grace as possible. However, a gentleman travelling on horseback carried at least one pistol, sometimes a brace of horsepistols, and a good long dirk. He didn't carry that dirk for ballast.

A decade ago, I ran into a marvelous diary of the era in Marietta, Ohio. I wish I owned it now. The man that had kept this diary was a bawdy old soul with a venomous pen and a gripe against the world. He didn't give a hang about fancy writing, he was too busy expressing himself on the world as he saw it. Nothing was too small or unimportant to get a good phrase from him; I remember his description of some barefoot rivermen—he said they were 'turtle-footed'.

It's not reluctance that keeps me from discussing my life. It's just that, in these significant times, I feel foolish mentioning the carbuncle I got in the north woods from an unbalanced diet of snowshoe rabbit—with a scar behind the ear to prove it. Or the time I almost fell overboard in the general neighborhood of Patagonia putting ratguards on a tramp freighter.

If you really insist, I'll give you a running thumbnail sketch of my life. In 1923, I believe, I was a sophomore at Wittenberg College, Ohio, and instructed a class under the head of the English department in, *ahem*, modern verse; the call of the sea, or maybe it was McFee or Conrad, induced me to turn over the baton in mid-semester, migrate to New Orleans, and go to sea. My experiences were those of hundreds of others. The only thing—it was the roaring twenties

(Continued on page 8)

BLACKOUT IN THE OPERATING ROOM!

A true story of the war, as told by SISTER ISABEL NIXON, *Head Nurse of St. Thomas Hospital, London,* to a war correspondent.

The centuries-old London hospital has three distinctions. It is London's most bombed hospital (undoubtedly because of its proximity to the Houses of Parliament just across the Thames). It has not during this war lost an air raid victim. And it was the home of Florence Nightingale. Headnurses still wear the same uniform and lace-edged frilled bonnets pioneer Nightingale wore during the Crimean campaign.

1 "It happened during a lull, after many hours of continuous bombing. We were operating on casualties brought to the underground emergency theatre. There was a terrific explosion nearby, then such a frightening blackness as could only come in an operating room . . .

2 "That single stray bomb had shattered the two outside electric plants. It would take time to rig up the emergency plant. Meanwhile we had a victim on the operating table, in danger of bleeding to death. I told all the nurses and medical students to get their flashlights . . .

3 "We grouped around the table, giving the surgeon the light he needed to save his patient . . . Because of the highly inflammable ether we couldn't have used a hurricane lamp. This was one of many, many cases where only flashlights with proper batteries could have been used to save life."

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(Continued from page 6)

and never a dull moment. I was in the coffee trade and still remember *ponga aqui!*, the phrase we used in the holds to direct the longshoremen in placing the straw mats against the metal bulkheads to prevent the sacked coffee from molding. I made most of the major eastern ports of South America.

I learned a lot of things in foc'sle sessions that so far I've not had the occasion to practice. I learned, for instance, how to keep a freshly slaughtered tortoise-shell wet so that you could get top-weight from the buyer.

You see how it is. You start talking about sea-life and it's hard to stop.

I'd like to say this before I finish. I've got a pretty good picture of the sort of valor the Merchant Marine is putting out. No professional man, no doctor or lawyer, ever took his profession more seriously—or had more deep-seated pride in it than do those men who go down to the sea in ships.

After I returned from the sea, I did various and sundry things, sandwiching three more colleges into the routine. My most recent visit to the campus was in '39 when I finished my Master's at Vanderbilt. I live in an Ohio village now and find I'm surrounded by pretty fine people.

Mr. Constiner reports that his wife Susannah has just commemorated his birthday by presenting him with a "Cramer Air-Flow Posture-Typewriting-Chair"—the old kitchen chair was gradually atrophying his spine—and that we may expect to see some more copy from him before long. That's the kind of wife we like to see a writer have. Go to it, Susannah, and make sure that your spouse keeps applying the seat of his breeches to the seat of the C.A.F.P.T.C!

IT WAS Mark Twain, wasn't it, who observed that despite the fact that people have been damning the weather all these years, nobody ever does anything about it? We were glad to meet Mr. Gaffney of "No Chance to Be a Hero" who did plenty about it, along with Stanley C. Vickers who introduced him to us and now tosses his own first chunk of fuel on our blaze—

Born in New Jersey in 1917, I waged a successful battle with the mosquitoes for eighteen years and then headed west to the hay fever belt with a $55 jalopy, a football scholarship and a desire to see the Mississippi River. I spent four glorious years at Monmouth College, Illinois, escaped hay fever and emerged with my B.A., an offer to coach and a wife with hay fever.

The coaching offer was refused. I returned east to edit a new newspaper and found it the vague idea of a man with vision but no money. Requiring the latter immediately, I instead found a post as assistant sports editor with a New York City publishing house. During my three years there, I made capital of good college English marks and a long ambition to be a writer. I sold sport stories and tired of reading manuscripts at the office when I was sure I could do better.

Since high school days I had nourished the thought of someday living in the northern Lake George region of the Adirondacks. So in September of 1942 I cut the tie that pays a regular weekly salary and became a freelancer with home headquarters at Ticonderoga, N. Y. I gave sports a rest by concentrating on detective, adventure and short story fiction.

My debut in *Adventure* was preluded by the steady rain diet of last summer, plus the Ticonderoga aphorism that "When the wind blows up Lake George from the south for three days, it brings rain." Becoming thus weather-conscious, I investigated it, visited the weather station of a New York State airfield and swung into "No Chance To Be A Hero."

BILL Gulick enclosed the following lines along with the picture, which we reproduce herewith to lend a graphic touch to the "Accident Report" he files on page 70—

I want to rise to defend a much maligned profession—that of the safety engineer. Construction men will know what I mean when I say that he is generally thought of as a sort of tenderfoot boy scout who forgot to grow up, a fellow who runs around continually shouting, "Be careful, be careful!" while somebody else does the dangerous work. He gets called a lot of names, very few of which he deserves, because yelling "Be careful!" is only a small part of his job.

Take this business of electrical shock. Every day linemen all over the country are working on lines carrying anywhere from 1100 to 110,000 volts—and doing their work while those lines are "hot."

(Continued on page 153)

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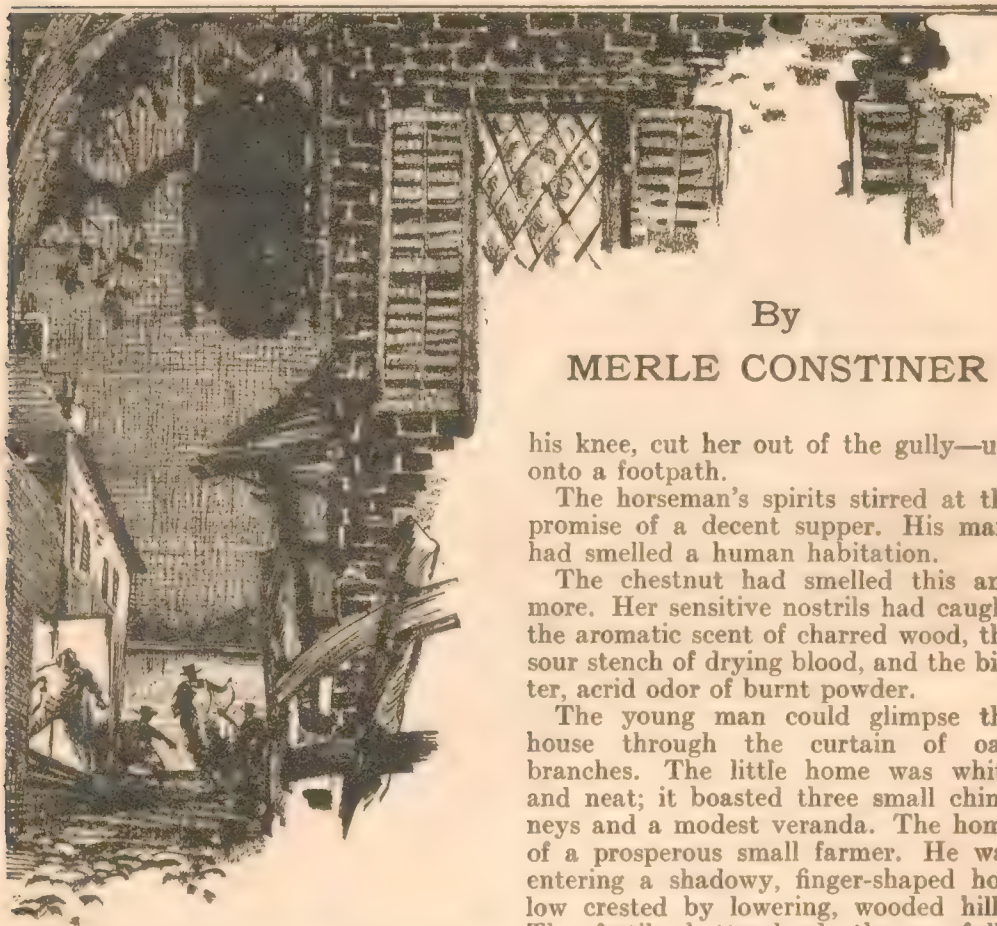
Where

THE horseman gave the mare an easy rein, allowed her to pick her own dainty way down the shaley creekbed. The rider was young, blocky, with a chest of granite; his stirrups were lowslung—for long traveling—and his crude, country-style saddlebags were filmed with pollenlike dust. It was a hot autumn twilight in the year 1841; diaphanous haze layered the leafy tunnel of the dry stream. The man and his mount were stiff and tired. For five days they'd nosed their way along tangled ridge-trails, fighting their passage through the wild, rolling Tennessee up-

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

Nests the Water-Snake



Bodette galloped out of the alleyway while a rasping, hysterical falsetto screamed, "Out, neighbors! Thief! Stop thief!"

By
MERLE CONSTINER

lands. Like hawk and deer and wolf, they had journeyed by the sun. Abruptly, the chestnut sorrel lifted her velvet lip and arched her fine head toward the west. The man touched her gently with his knee, cut her out of the gully—up, onto a footpath.

The horseman's spirits stirred at the promise of a decent supper. His mare had smelled a human habitation.

The chestnut had smelled this and more. Her sensitive nostrils had caught the aromatic scent of charred wood, the sour stench of drying blood, and the bitter, acrid odor of burnt powder.

The young man could glimpse the house through the curtain of oak branches. The little home was white and neat; it boasted three small chimneys and a modest veranda. The home of a prosperous small farmer. He was entering a shadowy, finger-shaped hollow crested by lowering, wooded hills. The fertile bottomland, the carefully tended lawn sloping to a timbered landing at the river's edge, the frugal clustered work buildings, were a welcome, friendly sight.

The horseman broke the foliage and came out into the clearing. It was then that he saw the dogs.

There were three of them, hounds, and they lay, belly-up, haphazard across the grass. Like stepping-stones. As

though they had been racing, single file, toward the river and had been dropped, one-two-three, by a pistoleer. The young man inflated his deep chest, called: "Hello, hello—the house!" There was no response.

He expected none.

He nudged his horse to the veranda, sat his saddle a second in stolid meditation. He took a shred of dried calamus root from his pocket, placed it on his tongue; the spicy herb stimulated him. He knew he was in the presence of death, knew it as surely as the red sun was setting in the pines. He was a man born and reared in a backwoods country of violent death. His great wish and worry was to do the proper and polite thing. The harsh bite of the calamus went through his veins like fire; he tried to visualize his father's presence, tried to hear his father's voice cautioning him just how to do the wellbred thing. He'd heard that outlanders had a different set of codes from back-country folks.

After a long, turbulent moment, he dismounted, tied his reins to a spindle in the porch rail. There seemed but one thing to do: enter and look around. He didn't like the prospect of invading a stranger's quarters unasked. He stepped through the open door, crossed the threshold.

The tiny living-room was cozy and comfortable. In the half light, he made out a few pieces of substantial furniture. There was a small carved organ. The walls were papered and hung with a scattering of gilt-framed pictures.

The bodies were on the floor. Two of them—and they were beyond help. They'd been dead, he judged, since maybe noon. The cup-cheeked man, the master of the house, with gnarled, calloused hands, had been shot three times in the chest. Beyond him, by the horsehair sofa, lay his wife—a fragile, sweet-faced woman with steel-rimmed glasses. The young man walked to the corner of the room, dropped to his hunkers. An attempt had been made to burn the house; kindling, taken from the hearth, had been heaped against the organ and lighted. In a mixture of slow, sultry anger and cold contempt, the traveler studied the awkward stacking of the tinderwood.

The house was a shambles. The mattress in the bedroom had been ripped to tatters, hearthstones had been pried from their casings. The traveler followed the litter of wreckage from room to room. It was bestial, vicious vandalism. He'd cut the trail of out-country marauders before but he'd never encountered anything like this.

He returned to the yard. Just to the left and rear of the log barn was a large sapling lean-to. The cotton shed. Empty. Sledge marks, the grooves of runners, cut the lawn from the lean-to down to the landing.

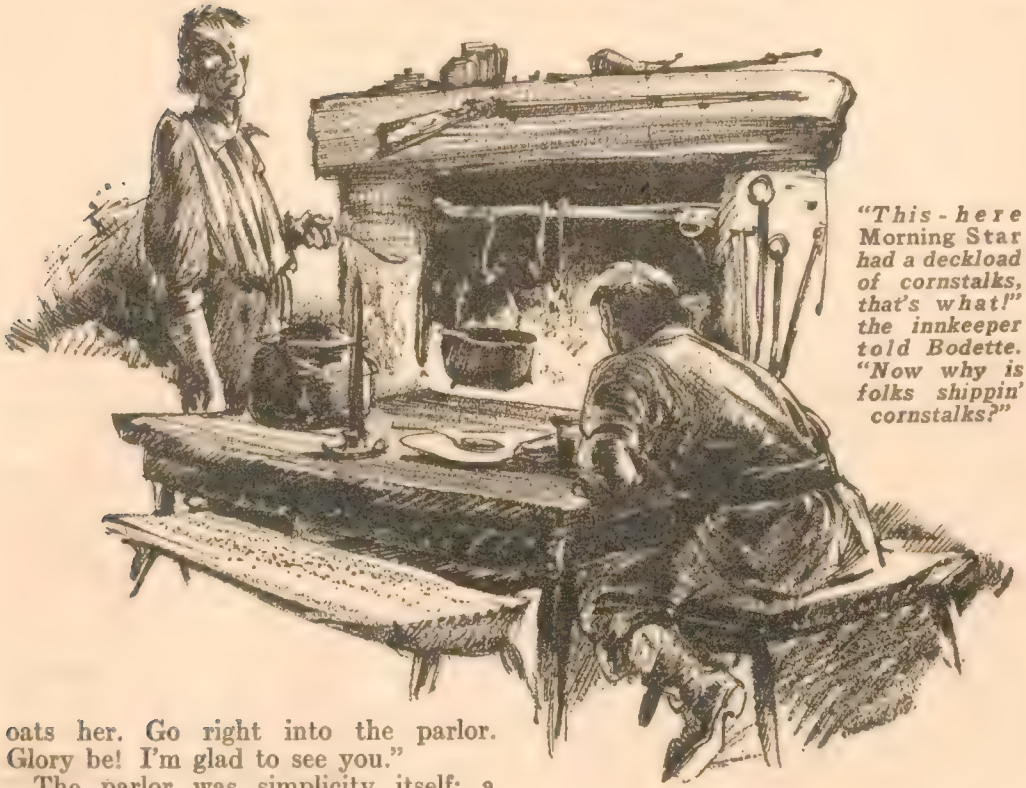
The young man went to his saddlebags, got a loaf of sugar wrapped in grape leaves and a canister of gunpowder tea. He re-entered the house, went to the kitchen, and made a small fire in the fireplace.

The sun slipped behind the hilltops. There was food on the table but the traveler scrupulously ignored it. It was good food, food that he hadn't seen since he left home. Pone and butter and corned beef. He brewed himself a cup of strong tea, sipped it in the gray-and-silver gloaming. Always, before his eyes, he saw those sledge marks in the soft grass. It's the cotton, he kept saying to himself, it's the cotton they came for.

He extinguished the fire, washed his cup from the cedar drinking pail. The chestnut mare was quivering in terror by the time he mounted her. They left the hollow by the river-road. A crescent moon above the lacy willows pooled the black, sluggish water with shifting gold.

IT WAS near ten, he reckoned, when he reached the inn. In the shroud of the river-bank brush, he almost passed it by. The shabby one-room hut sat squarely in the fork of the trail. An arrow of light shot out into the night from a gap in the chinking. He pulled up, shouted out the traditional halloo.

A lanky, crowlike figure framed itself in the doorway, took his bridle and invited him in. "Git down and make yorese'f to home. I'll take the mare back and



"This-here Morning Star *had a deckload of cornstalks, that's what!" the innkeeper told Bodette. "Now why is folks shippin' cornstalks?"*

oats her. Go right into the parlor. Glory be! I'm glad to see you."

The parlor was simplicity itself; a gaping fireplace, a rough-hewn table and three primitive benches. There was a pallet on the dirt floor in the corner—the innkeeper's. A pole-and-peg ladder leaned against the wall to a loft-hole in the ceiling. The young man placed his saddlebags over his knee, sat on a bench and waited. Shortly his host returned.

The innkeeper was wizened, with the leathery skin and steady eyes of a mountainman. He shoved an iron skillet into a handful of coals on the hearth. In no time at all, there were eggs and pork, cold cornbread and mustard greens on the table. "I'm Maxim Johnstone," the innkeeper said conversationally. "I succor to the wayfarer. I didn't quite ketch who you said you was."

The young man smiled. "That was a good meal. I'm Kingsley Lavender Bodette."

"Lawsy!" The innkeeper was impressed. "Well, son, hit's a honor and a pleasure to have you. You shore pack a passel of double-distilled names. Them's mighty fine families, all of 'em. Just who might you be and whur's yore home?"

This was the sort of talk the boy was used to, the sort he liked. "They are good names," he agreed gravely. "I come from the Blue Rock country."

The mountainman listened with interest. "I heered of that settlement. They's still a heap of Injuns back in them timber, hain't they?"

Bodette nodded. "Can I get to Talbotsville tomorrow?" He stood up.

"Hit's twelve bad miles. You kin make hit by sundown." The innkeeper looked hurt. "You ain't fixin' to go to bed! I git so lonesome out here sinst my grandaddy died on me. It's hellacious! I'm sociable-natured. Jest set a little—and let me tell you about the boat I seen come by this afternoon."

Bodette paused. "What about it?"

The innkeeper frowned. "I know the boats, all of 'em, that come up and down the river. This-here was a new one. I don't mean she was new. She was a rickety ole woodpile, with mighty good engines, though—named the *Morning Star* of Memphis. I mean I never seen her before. She was heading down-

stream; she must have slipped up at night."

Bodette pressed him. "What about her?"

"What about her? She had a deckload of cornstalks, that's what! Why is folks shippin' cornstalks, I ast you?"

Bodette went rigid. "I'll be getting to bed, sir. Where do I sleep? I'm saddle-sore."

"Up in the loft, son. They's a nice bed up thur." The innkeeper became suddenly self-conscious. He produced three little sticks. "These-here'll light you yore candle." He tried to cover up the pride in his voice. "Them's lucifers! I got 'em jest like the innkeepers in Talbotsville."

The loft wasn't bad at all; it looked plenty good to Bodette after four nights on the hard ground. He lit the candle with his steel, laid the matches warily on the corner of a table. A window was open; out in the fetid night, tree frogs skirled and nightbirds talked in the rustling hickories. The bed and the candle and the roof once more over his head engulfed Bodette in a sudden velvety wave of homesickness.

He'd looked forward to this journey for a long time; his parents had scrimped and saved for it. All at once, it lost its glamor.

He wanted to be back home. His penetration into the world of outlanders had gotten off to an evil start, it couldn't work out right with all this bad luck at the beginning. Tomorrow, he decided, he'd turn around and retrace those tedious trails back to his people.

He knew he was thinking unreal thoughts. His father had ridden with him to the northeast cornerstone. He'd shaken Bodette by the hand and had said, "Good-by, King. We'll see you in two years. When you pass this cornerstone again, I'll be waiting for you. Here, on this spot, you must read a passage in Tacitus, a passage from Homer and the first five verses of Genesis in the Hebrew for me. I guess that's all. Good luck. Be honest, courteous—for your mother's sake. And, by God, hold to your countenance for mine!"

When his father had said two years that was what he had meant; he didn't want to see his son in one year or even eighteen months.

Bodette took off his jacket, laid it neatly on the back of the chair. He took a short-barreled traveling-pistol from his shirt front, put it carefully beneath his pillow. From the crotch at the small of his back he drew a twelve-inch Chickasaw hunting knife. A heavy, capable weapon with a two-edged blade and a thong wrapped haft.

He stripped in the candlelight. His boxlike, brawny chest was a crisscross pattern of glazed scars—old, long forgotten bear wounds. Naked now but for a long sash wound about his abdomen, he blew out the candleflame.

This sash he left on. It contained two hundred dollars in gold, two hundred dollars in labor and privation. It was his matriculation fee to the Talbotsville Academy for Young Gentlemen.

He threw himself on the balsam mattress and in three minutes was asleep.

ALL the next morning Bodette pushed the chestnut sorrel and in this way, traveling by forced stages, he reached Talbotsville an hour after high-noon. He caught his first picture of the town from a fishline bend in the pike as he topped a small knoll. Alarmed, he checked his mare and gasped in amazement. Covering a point in the river, he'd never imagined so many buildings could be assembled in one grandiose cluster of red brick and shingle roofs. He tried to tally them, gave it up; it was worse than trying to count passenger pigeons. In a wild guess, he estimated that up to eight hundred people lived together in Talbotsville.

Close up, as the chestnut paced her sure-footed way along the rutted red-clay road of Main Street, the place didn't look so awesome. Deep in his heart, he kind of liked it. The glazed brick sidewalks were five feet above the street; the stone-and-brick shopfronts, with their small leaded windows and bright green shutters, were about on the level with his shoulder. He slowed the mare's walk, and with the muscles of his cheeks guardedly stiff, took in the sights from the corner of his eye. Sad-

dles, hats, boots, guns—anything that a man could want, they had right here.

Main Street ran east and west, across the neck of the point. Halfway down Main Street, and at right angles to it, a broad thoroughfare led a scant block to the cobblestone landing. This neighborhood, he learned, was known as Market Place. In search of food, he turned toward the river. Even his countryman's eyes noted one thing—the closer he got to the waterfront, the more disreputable became the shops.

The last shop in the line, facing the river, was an eating-house. Bodette hitched his mount at the rail, and entered. A row of hinged windows, waist high, ran across the shopfront; the sashes were thrown wide open to the bright yellow sunshine. He selected a table by the window, where he could keep a watch on his horse and, at the same time, entertain himself by viewing the dike and landing.

He'd just finished a good meal, reasonably priced, and was wondering how on earth a letter could ever find its tortuous way back to his family, when a squeaky voice and a breath of bad rum struck his ear. "Hain't nobuddy goin' to steal your mare, fellow Christian. We'uns got law and order."

Before Bodette could object, a man seated himself at the table. He was a plump little fellow with a jovial, roseate face and a network of purple veins running skimper-skamper over his nose and jowls. His clothes were threadbare and patched and his left coatsleeve, from cuff to shoulder, was smeared with white pigment. "My name's Mr. Ruby," the plump man declaimed. "And I'm drunker'n a calf midst the sorghum pumace. I see you a-gogglin' at my arm. I'm a painter by trade—and a drunkard by the hand of fate."

Bodette said kindly, "A little wine is good for the stomach."

"But I cain't stand wine and what I favor allus overruns me! It doesn't give you a steady hand, if you know what I mean. And a painter that hain't got no steady hand finds work hard to catch. Folks don't keer fer a painter with the

Kingsley Lavender Bodette

flutters." The plump man looked moody, said, "Take that job I had last night. I painted the boat, I painted my arm, here—" He touched his sleeve, grinned diabolically. "I durn near painted the skipper." His good-natured face went bellicose. "I wisht I had! I didn't like that feller!"

Bodette listened, amused. Suddenly, he blinked. "Have they got a sleight of doing night-painting here in Talbotsville? Well, I'll be doggoned!"

Mr. Ruby froze. "What am I sayin'? Pshaw! I'm talkin' crazy."

Bodette figured that night-painting was a trade secret; he said hastily, "I don't mean to meddle. Excuse me, sir."

Mr. Ruby was effuse apologies. "You hain't meddlin', fellow Christian. It's a funny sitchiashun and I'd like to get it off'n my chest. A minute ago you quoted Scriptures at me, didn't you?"

Bodette nodded. The painter said earnestly, "You're a upright man, I'm a upright man. I done something that troubles me. What should I do about it?"

Bodette was silent.

"Last night a certain party here in town, a gentleman who's mighty well thought of, come to me and said he'd give me ten dollars for two hours work. He said I'd have to do it by lantern. He give me instructions. It sounded like a windfall. About midnight, I took my brushes and stuff and walked about four mile up the river-road like he told me."

Bodette said frantically, "Mr. Ruby I don't believe I want to hear about this." He didn't know what might be coming but he wanted no share of any guilty knowledge.

The plump little painter paid him no heed. "Well, right where Turtle Creek comes in, there in the creekmouth, hid behind the willows, I found a dirty, scowy steamboat. She wasn't big, they was just three fellers aboard her, but she was powerful. They wanted me to change her name and port of registry. Now that hain't exactly legal. I didn't know how to git out'n it, so I done it. I painted out *Morning Star, Memphis,* and put on *L. G. Blount, Paducah.* I was scared to refuse. What I want to know is, should I go see preacher and tell him about it?"

Bodette said solemnly, "I don't think I'd tell anybody. I wouldn't mention it ever—as long as I lived! Did this boat have a deckload of cornshocks?"

Mr. Ruby shook his head. "Of course not. Who ever heered of shippin' cornshocks?"

They're in the clear now, Bodette thought bleakly. They consider all danger past. They've taken the cornstalks off the cotton. They no doubt possess forged bills-of-lading to prove false ownership. It's over and done. There's no way to stop them now; one man's cotton is like another's. He pushed back his chair. It wasn't any of his affair anyway. He asked, "How do I get to the Talbotsville Academy, Mr. Ruby?"

The painter looked disgusted. "I hain't a-goin' to tell you! You're too nice a feller to mess around with that goldarn female sewin'-circle!"

Bodette summoned the proprietor, tipped him to watch the chestnut sorrel, and strolled back to town.

THE college was a stern, two-story edifice on the village outskirts. Bodette was disappointed at the sight of it. Severe in pink brick and wrought iron, it sat back from the sidewalk in a grove of funereal cedars. Bodette started up the path when three young men, about his age, made an abrupt appearance

around the corner of the building and confronted him. They were walking arm-in-arm and the young countryman had never in his most distorted dreams imagined that such clothing existed. His first belief was that the youths were from some foreign and exotic land.

Until that moment, he'd never known that masculine garments came in colors. One of the boys wore a bottle-green jacket, a high collar and a plaid stock; his companion, the next in line—a pimpled youth with a thin beard, was garbed in a blue coat with gilt buttons, a white silk waistcoat with a rolled collar and a stock of changeable satin. Bodette's gaze got that far down the row and blurred on him. The end boy was simply a sensation of enormous mother-of-pearl buttons and purple shirt. Each of the students were precisely alike, however, in three sartorial details. All three wore Wellington boots, ridiculous floppy-brimmed Palm Leaf hats, and each carried a foolish little tasseled cane.

Bodette addressed the center youth. He spoke courteously, with the deference he would show to any stranger—especially a sick stranger. He asked, "Is this where they teach arithmetic and Greek?"

The pimpled youth went back arrogantly on his heels. "Why, may I enquire?"

Bodette answered simply, "Because I want some."

The young man with the saucer-sized buttons said to nobody in particular, "A good curry-comb could work wonders!" That set them off. They all snickered. The lad in the plaid stock pursed his lips. "First, I believe, I'd recommend dehorning!" The pimpled youth struck an attitude in graceful deportment, broke into a cascade of affected laughter. "And then, perhaps, a good stout ring in its nose. What do you say, gentlemen?"

Bodette felt embarrassed; he knew that they were taunting him but, somehow, it didn't bother him in the least. He was ashamed for them, as though they were lepers exhibiting their sores. He blushed fiery red, set his chin in the cup of his shoulder, and began walking. The circle broke in panic, let him through. Bodette marched up the path.

Mr. Ruby

Things didn't get any better.

The headmaster's office was a dingy, moldy cubbyhole at the back of the dank groundfloor corridor. The sign on the door said, *St. John Vaden.* Bodette entered without knocking. Dr. Vaden was an enormous, repulsively handsome gentleman, glinting in fine-broadcloth and dazzling in a white cambric shirt. He was lounging behind a flat-topped desk, fiddling with a quill. There was the suspicious, sweetish smell of port in the air. The headmaster, when interrupted, was tracing a showy cameo thumb-ring with the tip of the feather, little finger extended. He glanced up, said coldly, "It's the cook that buys the cabbages."

So it was going to be this way from now on!

The young man said affably, "I'm Kingsley Lavender Bodette. I'm from the Blue Rock country. I want to enroll in your school."

The headmaster almost fell from his chair. "Did you say Kingsley and Lavender and Bodette all in one breath!" He looked startled. "The cream of the southland!" All at once, he was back in his old haughty manner. "We don't teach—er—horticulture. And we don't extend credit."

Bodette reached into his tunic, laid a fistful of gold coins on the desk. "That's two hundred dollars. That pays for two years. Do you want it, or shall I take it back home?"

Dr. Vaden's eyes bulged. His trembling hand held forth a paper. "We're delighted to have you with us, Mr. Bodette." He indicated a blank on the document. "Sign, here, please." He put it like a question; his voice said plainly, Sign here—if you can write your name.

Bodette took the pen, inscribed his signature in beautiful shaded copperplate. He said shortly, "I'm going back to town. I've got to get my mare." He paused in the doorway asked curiously, "What's all this hullaballoo around town? Everybody gossiping about cotton thieves."

"It's been bad for two weeks. They've hit all the adjacent counties but they've left ours alone. I imagine they're afraid of us—we have quite a reputation for law and order." The headmaster was smug. He frowned. "It's quite a mystery, you know. The cotton just disappears! How can a cumbersome thing like cotton vanish into thin air!"

Bodette turned on his heel, strode down the corridor. They've hit your county now, he thought grimly; and they've not finished. My bet is that they'll repeat again and again.

AS BODETTE approached the corner of Main and Market he observed a knot of townsmen gathered on the sidewalk. There must have been twenty of them, not counting little boys and

All at once there was a long-barreled pistol in Landers' hand. He lowered his arm slowly and shot . . . and Mr. Ruby folded in mid-air.

mangy dogs. They were standing around with tolerant, half-amused smirks on their faces, staring down into the lower level of the sunken red-clay road. Bodette thought at first that he'd run smack into a belling; he changed his mind as he got nearer and figured it as an election. He was wrong. It was a fight.

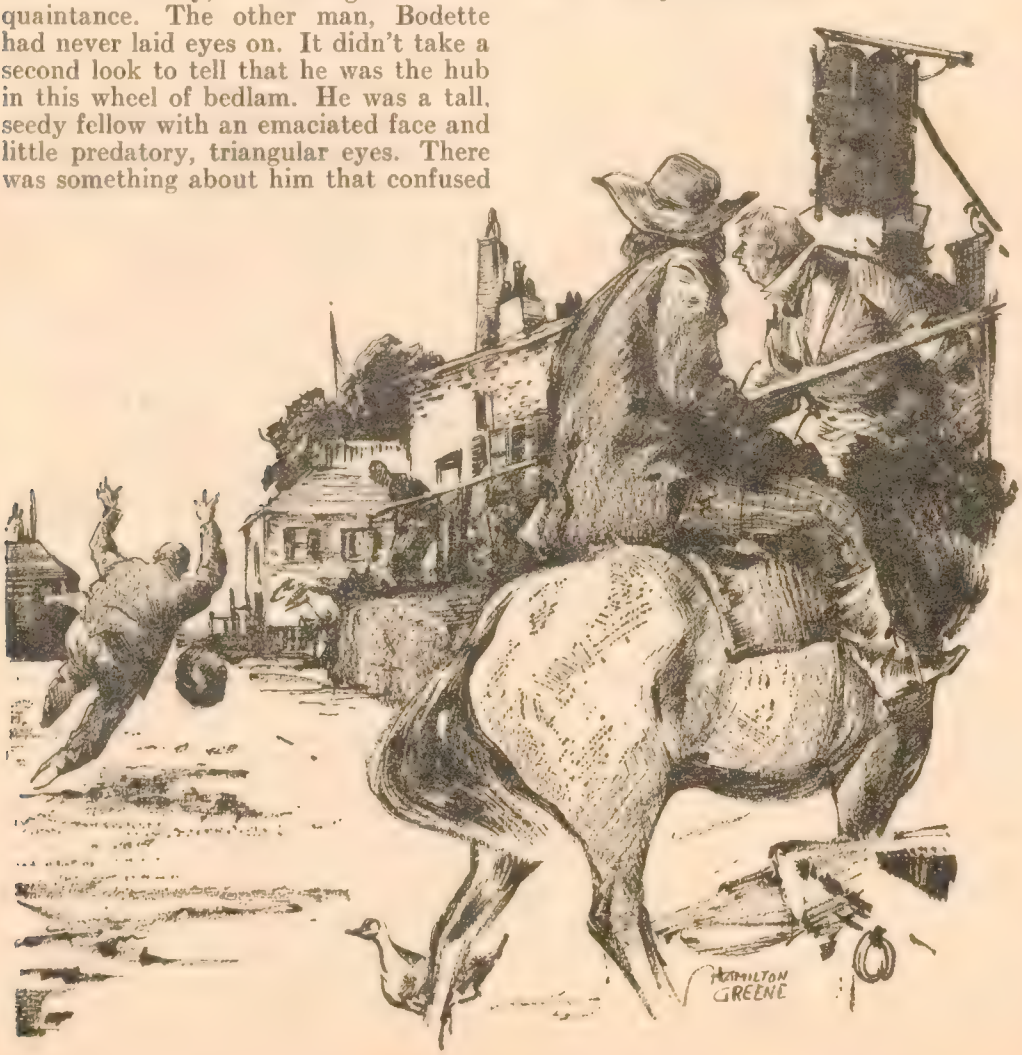
It wasn't even a fight—it was more of a noisy argument.

Two men stood in the center of the street. They stood close up to each other and one of them was flailing his arms and mouthing incoherent threats. Bodette slowed up, got out his calamus root and leaned against a shopfront.

The boisterous party was none other than Mr. Ruby, his eating-house acquaintance. The other man, Bodette had never laid eyes on. It didn't take a second look to tell that he was the hub in this wheel of bedlam. He was a tall, seedy fellow with an emaciated face and little predatory, triangular eyes. There was something about him that confused Bodette; it was as though you placed one picture over another, and the underneath picture showed through. His seamy black suit was humble and pious. his tall crowned beaver, its logwood dye long faded to mottled purple, was conservative, almost religious in its style, yet the man himself brought to Bodette's mind the vision of the only hanging he had ever witnessed. He reminded Bodette of a stage-robber his father's posse had caught and executed many years ago.

Bodette spoke to a bystander. "Who's the man with Mr. Ruby?"

"That's Brother Landers." The bystander chuckled. "A right well t'do merchant and a pillar in the church. Don't worry none about him."



Dr. St. John Vaden

Landers was slouched slightly forward from the waist. He appeared to be taking the little painter's abuse in icy self-righteousness. All through the tirade, he listened in stony silence. That was the way it looked to the throng of idle watchers. Bodette had the uneasy feeling that his eyes were somehow deceiving him.

Bodette worked the trick out by logic. Ruby, the painter, was hopping around, shaking his fist and yelling; Landers was standing perfectly still, motionless, but for one absent gesture. The merchant held a big handkerchief balled loosely in his hand; periodically, almost mechanically, he raised the handkerchief to the corner of his nose and wiped his cheek. Invariably, Bodette noticed, the gesture somehow coincided with a burst of inarticulate anger from his assailant.

Every time Landers wiped his face Mr. Ruby yelled at him.

Bodette watched more closely. Up came the handkerchief, the crowsfeet at the corner of the merchant's eyes flickered—Mr. Ruby increased his ranting.

Landers, behind the cover of his handkerchief, was talking to the painter; he was forming words silently with his lips. He was goading the little man on, deliberately baiting him into a frenzy of temper!

Once more the merchant wiped his cheek. A queer look of incredulous terror came over the little painter's face. He froze in his tracks, his mouth slack-jawed, stunned. He wheeled, locked his arms protectingly over his head, and started in an awkward lope down the road.

All at once, there was a long-barreled pistol in Landers' hand. He lowered his arm slowly, like a duelist in practice, and shot.

Mr. Ruby folded in mid-air, rolled on the ground like a hedge apple, lay suddenly still.

The merchant turned to the gallery of spectators above him. "You heard him," he called. "He was off to fire my shop. If he didn't do it now, he'd have done it some dark night. We don't want any arsonists in Talbotsville. This is a city of law and order!"

Landers pocketed his pistol, turned his back and walked away. You could tell by the droop of his shoulder that he was overcome with remorse because he'd had to destroy an unarmed man in the light of public welfare.

CHAPTER II

THE ANVIL AND THE CHAIN

STANDING high on the sidewalk that way, and looking down into the channel of the road, it was just like watching a butchering in a pit. To Bodette, through the grace of his being a complete stranger, it showed up clearly and brutally for exactly what it was: unprovoked murder.

An oxcart paused and picked up the limp corpse of Mr. Ruby. The crowd thinned out, vanished. The little boys went back to their hoop rolling; the mangy dogs sauntered off and curled up in the sun. A great, sullen bull-like rage surged blackly through the heart of King Bodette. The fury came on him slowly, before he realized it—and when it grasped him, he was appalled. Time and again, as a youngster, he'd seen the great rage, the bottomless fury, come over his father but never until now had he, himself, experienced it. His mouth dried.

He thrust his hands behind his back to hide their trembling.

He knew now that the massacre of the small farmer and his gentle-faced wife, in that back-country inlet, was not the hit-and-miss work of itinerant, stupid, half-savage desperados. There was planning and scheming in this! There was a pattern of carefully intersecting threads of blood. The tragic slaying of the farmer, the steamboat with the altered name, and Brother Landers. These were all different aspects of the same thing! It was Landers who was the key to the whole sequence of events.

The facts were there, as plain as the lines on your hand. Landers had shot the little painter to close his mouth. Landers was involved with the *Morning Star,* now the *L. G. Blount;* the pious merchant was therefore an obvious element in the cotton robbery. The point, as Bodette saw it, was this: Landers was a local yet robberies had been reported over a wide range of counties. Talbotsville was certainly no port of dispersal. This indicated that the thieving was the work of a large and well organized gang. Landers must, as a consequence, be a small but important cog in the arrangement. As a merchant, he'd be in a mighty fine position to indicate to outsiders where good staple could be taken with little risk.

No two ways about it, this thing was big. There flashed into Bodette's mind the memory of that passage in Isaiah, *They hatch the adder's eggs, and weave the spider's web; he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper!*

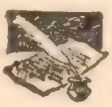
He'd left his hill-home and come into town, minding his own business, going about his honest way; three times, one after another, the unholy web had brushed across his face. Every way he turned, he ran into it.

If that's the way they want it, he decided darkly, that's the way they'll get it. Somebody has to stop these evil goings-on. I'll take a hand in this, myself.

He saw several things right off. First it was going to take a cool head—and second, it was going to take money.

Obed Landers

He straightened up from the brick wall, started back to the Talbotsville Academy and Dr. St. John Vaden.



THE headmaster hadn't left his office. It was Bodette's impression that the schoolman likely spent the total of his waking hours behind his office desk. Bodette, stepping briskly through the door, caught him, chin tilted upward, a long-stemmed goblet at his lip. Dr. Vaden juggled the glass in surprise, tried to hide it under his coat lapel, changed his mind and put it in a compartment with a five-gallon jug. He mumbled something about a kidney regulator. Recognizing his visitor, his manner changed.

"Mr. Bodette, eh?" He leaned back in his chair, inspected the glossy toes of his immaculate Hessian boots. "I'm glad you dropped in, and I'm glad you came just the way you did—like a whirlwind, without knocking. You are now enrolled at this academy; it's time that your lessons begin. We teach not only liberal art, sir, we also instruct in deportment and gentlemanly behavior." He slavered at the edge of his mouth. "Hand me that cane." He pointed to a heavy hickory rod standing in the corner. "I don't like you, I didn't the moment I set eyes on you—but that's beside the point. It's incumbent upon me to instruct my pupils properly."

Bodette said pleasantly, "Don't order me around. If you want that stick, get it yourself. I'm not a member of this rabbit warren."

Dr. Vaden asked harshly, "What are you saying? You're out of your head."

"I've been pondering," Bodette explained. "I've got a special job to take care of. I don't feel, after all, that I can spare two years of my life, at this time, in this place."

The headmaster sneered. "Suit yourself. Good-bye, get out."

"I'll take my two hundred dollars, sir."

Dr. Vaden leaned forward. "You'll what? That's what I get for dealing with bumpkins. Aren't you aware, young man, that you've matriculated? That you've placed your name on papers of forfeiture? The two hundred dollars passed from your ownership the instant you put your pen to that document. That's law. Now, I must ask you to leave. You've got my office smelling like a stall."

Knots gathered along Bodette's jaw; the veins on his temples pressed out like waxen tapers.

Dr. Vaden said irritably, "Well, what are you standing there staring at? The money's in the strongbox—and there it'll stay!"

"I was just looking at your hair. It's certainly a nice bay, with all those little curls. I was just thinking of a wealthy old Chickasaw chief I know back in Blue Rock. He'd give two hundred dollars, quick, just to own a scalp like that. It's been forty years since he's had one in his house." The possession of a scalp in Blue Rock, Bodette reflected, would get you a rope around your neck in six minutes flat. He went on woodenly, "If I just had some way of getting it off of your head and taking it back with me. . . ."

Dr. Vaden faltered. "Absurd!" He tried to laugh it off, to go along with the joke. "You'd need a knife, wouldn't you?"

Bodette said solemnly, "That part wouldn't be hard. I reckon I could dig up a knife some place."

There was a taut silence. Finally, the headmaster's nerves broke. He dragged an iron-banded oak coffer out of the desk drawer, unlocked it, counted out two hundred dollars in gold coin. His wrists were wet with perspiration. "There you are." He made a sickly effort at being amiable. "I'm sorry the Academy's not quite up to your standards. Give my best regards to your kinfolks, sir."

Bodette thanked him. "If you're ever back at Blue Rock," he added politely, "look us up."

He left Dr. Vaden, aged ten years, groping in the liquor compartment for his jug and goblet.

THE little story-and-a-half shop was cheery-looking, almost friendly. The only blemish against it was the neighborhood, a district of tobacco sheds and ramshackle warehouses, just beyond the edge of the business section, on the waterfront. It was a cozy brick building painted bright yellow with gay blue shutters; its old handsplit shingles were slabbed with soft emerald moss. The two street windows, set just above eye level, were of bubbled glass in tiny diamond-leaded panes. The sign hanging out on a wrought iron arm from the door jamb said, *OBED LANDERS, Sundries & Necessaries.*

Bodette swung open the door and entered; a bell tinkled from the backroom. Behind the narrow counter, rows of shelves were lined with canisters and utensils, crockery and hardware. There was the pleasant smell of oiled harness and spice. The place had the feel of solid respectability. A curtain parted at the rear and Brother Landers came forward to meet him. Servilely, the cadaverous merchant awaited his caller's pleasure.

Bodette laid five dollars on the counter. He relaxed the muscles of his face, assumed an oafish expression and said timidly, "I'm highly pleased to meet you."

Landers was nonplussed. With an effort, he diverted his eyes from the money. "Can I be of service, sir? Is there something you want?"

"I want to be a fine gentleman, like you."

The merchant's squint eyes displayed befuddlement. Bodette became voluble. "I'm ashamed of my pap. He just a countryman. I want to be a fine gentleman. Who ever heard of a fine gentleman cutting cordwood and skinning skunks? I want to wear a fine coat, like you'rn, and sit in the front pew at church. I've just up and run away from home, goldang it! I saved this money up last winter selling pond ice; I been miserin' it along to come to town. Well, here I am! I want to own a shop like this myself. And I want you to learn me how."

Comprehension dawned in Landers' cruel face. "Oh, I see. I think I understand. You want to apprentice yourself to me. H-m-m-m!" He seemed torn by some inner conflict. "Could you come back, say, next week?"

Bodette was agreeable. "Why, sure. Only, of course, I wouldn't have my five dollars. I'd have to take quarters and wait and . . ."

Landers came to a decision. He slipped the coin into the folds of his voluminous coat. "I'll do it. This'll pay for one week. You're a smart lad—you'll learn everything in a week. What's your name?"

"Sarah Louise Elbertson," Bodette said proudly. "I'm named for my paternal grandmammy. She's got the papers to the land. Folks call me Lou." He looked wistful. "Five dollars is a lot of money!"

Landers gaffed his fish. "Certainly it is. But think of what you'll learn!" He put on a show of false enthusiasm, leaned forward and whispered, "This is in strictest confidence. Do you know what? We use the high-class Italian method of double entry bookkeeping!"

Bodette said happily, "For land's sakes! I never even heard of it!"

BODETTE'S room was a foul, cobwebbed attic at the back of the shop, at the top of a rickety flight of stairs. He sat at the deal table and munched a sample of Brother Landers' fare, a supper of dry bread and hard, tasteless cheese. Directly below his window was the roof of a one-story annex built onto the rear of the store; he could look down into a small, enclosed courtyard. In the courtyard was a crude stable and, over in one corner, a root cellar. The root cellar was an earth-covered, tent-shaped mound about three feet above the ground. A tile pipe, the ventilator, stuck up from the mound's center and flagstone steps descended to a small pilfer-proof door. Beyond the courtyard fence was an old abandoned pier supported by careening piles. The river came right up to Brother Landers' backyard.

If he could stand the food, Bodette ruminated, he could stick it out. His brief conversation with the merchant as to an apprentice's duties was somewhat surprising. He was to eat his supper, get his mare and stable her, return to his room and spend the evening there. He was to obey these orders to the letter. Tomorrow, merchant Landers promised, would begin his research into the secret cult of Italian double-entry bookkeeping. That was all that was expected of him, no shopwork, no clerking, nothing else.

Autumn dusk had fallen over the lazy little town by the time Bodette set out for Market Place—and his chestnut sorrel. As he walked the back streets, certain fragments of his conversation with the merchant, bits that he'd hardly heard at the time, gathered themselves together in his memory. Repeatedly, during the interview, Landers had insisted on one point. "Feed your horse properly before you bed her . . . see that the mare's amply fed . . . give your mare a generous meal before you put her up for the night." Bodette had known mean men before who'd had a quirk in their hearts for animals but somehow the explanation didn't satisfy him; he was troubled.

He found the chestnut sorrel where he had left her, at the hitching-rail before the eating-house. She whinnied softly as he approached. He rubbed her nose affectionately, swung into the saddle. "Come along, old lady," he said. "It's been a long day, hasn't it? We're fixing to go to bed."

The courtyard behind Landers' shop was reached by a narrow passage between the building and a high board

fence. Bodette, unfamiliar with his surroundings, dismounted and led his horse by the bridle. They came out of the shadowed alleyway, crossed the courtyard, and entered the stable.

Landers' stable, like his shop, was trim and clean. There were three stalls, empty; Bodette maneuvered his mare into the first. He hung his saddle and bridle on a wall-hook, groomed her carefully. He found oats in a nearby bin, placed a liberal supply in the feeding trough, and left her champing placidly as he searched the gloom for clean hay.

The small haypile was just inside and to the right of the door. Bodette bent forward, hugged an armful to his chest. His fingers felt cold iron. Curious, he investigated. An anvil was hidden in the hay. That, in itself, was not too strange; there was, however, a detail to his discovery that baffled him. Fastened securely about the anvil, and coiled neatly beside it, was a seven foot chain. It didn't make any sense; you don't chain anvils. He groped for the end of the chain, found that it was free. He hunched in the darkness, tried to reason it out but had to give it up.

He laid the mare a deep fragrant bed, closed the shed door behind him and stepped out into the night.

He was almost across the yard, heading for the shop, when he noticed an eerie thing.

There was an ancient, gnarled locust in the court. High up, in the center of the tree, smothered by the branches, was a pallid, mottled silver something. It shifted and glowed in supernatural luminescence. Bodette's neck went frosty-cold. He'd heard about death-lights before; he'd always scoffed at the story. Now, he was actually seeing one!

It took him a second to figure it out —and the answer amazed him even more! Just below, and to one side of the tree, was the dim hulk of the root cellar; he could make out the indistinct lines of the mounded sod roof, the up-thrusting tile-pipe ventilator. The glow in the branches must be coming from the pipe ventilator. The beam of light, thrown upward, was invisible until it touched the foliage. There was someone in the root cellar with a lantern!

ROOT cellars are for winter storage; folks don't use root-cellars in early autumn! The occupant of that cellar, Bodette reasoned, has no business there!

Keeping close to the tall wooden fence, he reached the mound, passed his hand above the ventilator and caught a glaze of yellow light on his fingers. He could hear voices. He attempted to peer down the opening and found he could see only the hands and knees of a seated figure—Landers!

There were two speakers and their voices overlapped in argument; Landers' belligerent, frightened—the second voice, a sugary, rasping falsetto, menacingly gentle.

The honeyed voice said, "Those are my instructions. I'm too tired to debate with you. So I missed Francher and his *Morning Star*, which you say is now the *Blount*, by four hours, eh?" The voice was thoughtful. "Well, I can cross the line into Kentucky, head northeast and overtake him easily before he hits Stiles Flat. He'll have to work the backwaters of the Green before he makes out his report with the steel pen." There was a pause. "Get me food."

Landers asked, "Why does Francher have to make out his report with a steel pen?"

The sickly sweet voice said, "Just forget the steel pen. It's no concern of yours. It was a slip. I'm tired or I wouldn't have mentioned it. I want food, I want good food, and I want it in a hurry. I have to be off."

Landers said angrily, "I spot the cotton for you. Francher pays me. We're quits. I don't know who you are—and I care less. You can't move in on me like this and order me around like I'm a bondboy. My negotiations are strictly with Francher and his *Morning Star*. I killed a man this afternoon for you people. The pay I get in proportion to the risk I take is mighty sorry. As I say, I don't know who you are—but one thing I do know, I don't want you around my place. What if my apprentice should see you?"

The voice sounded interested. "Your apprentice? Now think of that! When we contacted you we understood that

One by one, Landers lowered the two bundles over the pier's edge into the rowboat which slid laboriously out into the river.

you ran your little establishment solo. I'd like to hear a little more on this point."

"Don't take that tone with me." Landers snarled. "You and your fancy clothes. And your Northern accent." He changed his manner, said placatingly, "The boy's an oaf from the hills. He paid me five dollars for one week to learn bookkeeping."

"And he came just the day that hell split open?"

"A coincidence, yes."

"Of all the first-rate shops in town he, a countryboy, wormed his way back here in Talbotsville's down-at-the-heels slums and picked you as his mentor!" The rasping falsetto sighed. "It's lucky I dropped by. Ho-hum. Let's get to the story of that shooting."

"The man's name was Ruby, he was a painter. . . ."

Bodette left the drone of voices. He entered the shop by the back door, climbed the stairs to the landing, and waited. After a short time, Landers passed through the hall below him, went into the kitchen. There was the sound of banging pots and pans, of ill-tempered expletives. Bodette descended the steps heavily, appeared on the threshold.

The seedy, black frocked merchant was at a stove, setting a tin tray with meat and vegetables. Bodette looked

stupid, said blandly, "Well, Mr. Landers, I've done stabled my mare. What do you want I should do now?"

The merchant was apoplectic. "Go to your attic!" he shouted. "Go to bed."

Bodette dipped his head in agreement. "Thank you, sir. It's past my bedtime. It's nigh eight-thirty!" He faltered, said foolishly, "I want to ask you a question—" Landers went rigid. Bodette continued easily, "Out in the stable they's a anvil with a chain fastened on it. Now I been figurin' and figurin'. I cain't make no sense of it. Why do city folks put long chains on anvils?"

It was plain to see that the merchant was frankly and genuinely puzzled. "There's an anvil in the shed," he confirmed. "But it has no chain on it. You've been drinking! Now go up to bed. I'll be gone all evening. I'm taking a few delicacies over to a sick neighbor."

A sick neighbor, Bodette laughed silently. There was enough beef and potatoes on that platter to fill a three-gallon bucket!

IN HIS room, Bodette pulled a stool up to the open window, sat silently in the dark. Thick curd-like clouds lay across the moon. He hunched forward, rested his elbows on the sill. He was just in time to see the door to the root-cellar open, to catch the silhouette of Landers and his tray against the lighted panel. The yellow light blacked out and the courtyard was again a hollow square of velvet, impenetrable shadows.

For a long time, perhaps a quarter of an hour, he crouched there, staring into the pooled gloom. He tried to adjust his sight to the swathe of blackness but the harder he looked, the more blurred became his vision. He attempted to develop a night-eye, like an owl, by voluntarily expanding his pupils; this didn't seem to work either. His mind dulled from the excruciating concentration. It was difficult to keep his senses on his vigil.

All at once he realized that he was staring at movement. He'd been observing it for some time without being aware of it! He couldn't explain it, it was just a sensation—just movement. A queer, humpbacked figure was wobbling across the courtyard. The clouds were thinning before the moon, but not sufficiently to make out the figure's hazy hulk. Its progress was slow and tedious. It must have emerged from the root cellar.

The grotesque phantom surged to the fence, opened a gate, shuffled out onto the abandoned pier. It was a man, Bodette decided, carrying something that looked like a rolled carpet. The man placed his burden on the dock, reentered the yard; now he paused, entered the stable. Almost instantly he reappeared; his load this time was smaller but extremely heavy. He struggled with the second object, got it out onto the pier, laid it beside the first.

So he's done it, Bodette thought bleakly. He's slain his unwelcome guest! This day, he's destroyed two men.

One by one, Landers lowered the two bundles, the large one and the small, over the pier's edge, followed them from sight. A rowboat appeared from the network of piles, slid laboriously out onto the river.

The boat stopped. There was a faint, gurgling splash. The boat began its slow *clickety-clack, clickety-clack* return.

Now Bodette understood the anvil and the chain. He'd seen a man buried in the turgid, sluggish river.

Abruptly, as the figure passed back through the gate, Bodette got the shock of his life. It wasn't Landers! This man was a good foot shorter than the lanky merchant. It was the man with the rasping, honeyed falsetto. It had to be. Bodette had just witnessed the watery interment of Obed Landers, himself!

The indistinct form blended into the obscurity of the fence.

The boy held his breath, waited tensely for the figure to again materialize.

There was a nerve-wracking interval; nothing happened. Clouds cleared themselves from the face of the moon and the courtyard was bathed in brilliant silvery radiance. Every nook and cranny of the enclosure glowed in the moonlight. The man was gone. There was the locust tree, the stable and the mound. That was all; just these and the two gray cats.

A rustle sounded behind him, from the attic staircase! The peril was on him before he knew it.

The cats were hunched and motionless on the hard earth, about four feet from the fence. Bodette hardly noticed them. He wondered if the sweet-voiced man was down in the root cellar obliterating the evidences of his crime.

A rustle sounded behind him, from the attic staircase! The peril was on him before he realized it! His racing mind knew now the significance of those crouching cats. They weren't cats at all —they were boots. The killer had slipped them off, was stalking Bodette this instant on the stair-steps, in his stocking feet.

There was the faint, metallic tinkle as a patient hand fumbled at the doorlatch. Bodette slid through the window, descended the sloping roof, and dropped to the ground. In the stress of danger, his first thought was for the safety of his mare.

The stable was empty.

For a moment, the boy lost his head. He rushed into the yard, thrust his fingers in his mouth and whistled. The torso of a man leaned out from his garret window, pointed a fowling-piece in his direction, and fired. His mare neighed urgently from the narrow passageway behind the shops. Bodette reached her on the run, found her saddled and bridled. He discovered, as he mounted, that his hand was wet with blood; he was wounded. A rasping, hysterical falsetto was screaming into the night, "Out! Out, neighbors! Out! Thief! Thief!" Lights were coming on up and down the street.

Bodette touched his mare's flank with his heel; she cut loose with a bound out of the alleyway, launched herself into the road, and was away in a hammering gallop. He gave her free choice of direction.

Talbotsville, the city of law and order! He'd seen a sample or two of the town's justice. It didn't appeal to him. It was a good time to get long gone!

CHAPTER III

THE BLACK SADDLEBAGS

BODETTE, low in the saddle, had left the town a good two miles behind him when he first heard the tolling of the bell. It sounded suspiciously like a schoolbell and it meant that the village was arousing itself into a full-fledged manhunt. Against the background of the dull, rhythmic clanging, he caught the night-muted overtones of distant, excited shouts. Riders were gathering. So this was what his quest for Greek and Hebrew had brought him! A fugitive, and wounded, and Dr. Vaden's academy bell was unwittingly ringing out the knell for his capture. He checked his mount stock-still in the middle of the road and listened.

They'd break up in groups and fan out. They'd cover all the trails, hell for leather, in small independent parties. They'd comb everything that lay before them every spur and backroad; it was good sport if you were with the hounds. They'd done this before; they knew the system. Well, he decided, the more the

merrier. His father had a saying: Ten men are easier to deceive than one—the ten deceive each other.

He pivoted his mare, retraced a quarter of a mile to a fork, located a footpath into the timber. The path branched inland, back into the timbered hills. A quarter of a mile from the pike, he stopped and waited. His wound was causing him no pain; he made a quick, cursory examination. His sleeve was bloody, his shoulder was growing stiff.

The search party on the turnpike was composed of three horsemen. He caught their thudding hoofbeats, analyzed them with his woodsman's ear. A work horse, a fine gaited racer, and a stolid riding-mule. He set himself, let them get by the juncture, took his short-barreled pistol from his tunic and fired into a tree bole. There was confusion on the pike, a wheeling of mounts.

Bodette edged his mare quietly into the scrub. He angled directly into the brush and bracken, came out again on the turnpike at almost the exact point where he had first reined up in his flight.

For some distance, the pike progressed flatly, along the rich bottoms; abruptly, it began a steep climb into precipitous cliffs. Here Bodette left the highroad and took a loggers' path to the river. A shelf of marshy, swampland edged the stream; beyond this wild lip of land rose sheer limestone crags. The highroad looped back behind the bluffs.

Headway along the riverbank was tedious and difficult. A trapper's trail led him into a canebrake, and from then on, endlessly, during the long night, his mare nosed her way through a labyrinth of deer-runs. It was like traveling in a chasm of granite; the massed, close-set canes reaching high above his head were an iron wall to either side of his shoulder. Always, he could see the stars overhead and always he could smell the fetid river. But always too, there was no way to go but forward. His shoulder was paining him now.

Just before dawn he cleared the brake. He passed an abandoned sawmill and a few yards farther on, observed a small ferryman's shack. He routed the boatman from his bed and persuaded him to cross the river.

It was this way, in the cherry light of the early morning sun, that Bodette reached Kentucky soil. There were two objectives in the boy's mind—and both were hazy.

The first thing was to get his wound tended, the second was to find that place known as Stiles Flat. Stiles Flat, the rendezvous mentioned by the man in the root cellar. It might be two miles away—or two hundred; Bodette hadn't the slightest idea. One thing he did know, though: the *L. G. Blount* was due there, with its skipper, Francher, and his crew of cut-throats. And these were folks that Bodette wanted mightily to meet up with. His weary, battered mind went back to the little farmhouse and the organ and the gentle-faced woman in the steel-rimmed glasses. This was the urge that drove him on; this, to him, was the evil symbol of all the vicious carnage that had blocked his path.

The Kentucky shore was different from the Tennessee—but that was about all. It was, if anything, less attractive. Low, yellow and muddy, stagnant sloughs cut its backwater; the drought of autumn and the receding river had left the mark of saffron clay everywhere. The driftwood along the water's edge was caked with dust; the drooping willow leaves were glazed with silt from the retreating stream. Keeping a sharp watch for copperheads, Bodette struck inland.

ABOUT mid-morning, Bodette encountered the boy. He'd just passed a springhouse, and knew there were humans about, but he didn't realize how close! The driftwood and backwater of the riverbank had gone into sumac and sassafras and hazel. He was idling his mare through a pawpaw patch when the boy stepped out from behind a laurel and halted him.

Bodette judged this sudden apparition to be not more than ten years old. The child was pinch-faced and pigeon chested and dressed in baggy, orange pantaloons which Bodette, to his amazement, finally made out to be a pair of old-style gentleman's knee breeches. He

was carrying a man-sized musket and he held it shovel fashion, one hand around the trigger-guard and the other about a third of the way down the barrel. "Be careful," he warned, "or I'll plug your horse. I know you Tennesseans—you don't scare but you sure favor your horseflesh."

Bodette said kindly, "If you'll just mount that thing on wheels, son, and drag it back in the brush, maybe we could get together on this. You're too young to be gun-threatenin' strangers. Where's your hospitality? And where did you come from, anyway?"

"I'm Graham McCabe," the child said truculently. "And I'm proud to say I haven't got any hospitality. I've been following you ever since you stepped onto our land. Get going, traveler; I'll just dog-trot along behind you."

Bodette declared calmly, "I'm wounded friend. Take me home with you. I mean no harm."

The boy was harsh. "Everybody gets wounded sometime or another." He faltered. "Are you a Frazee?"

"No, son. I'm a Bodette."

"Are you a preacher?"

Bodette smiled. "No, I'm not. Don't tell me you've got that big gun out for preachers?"

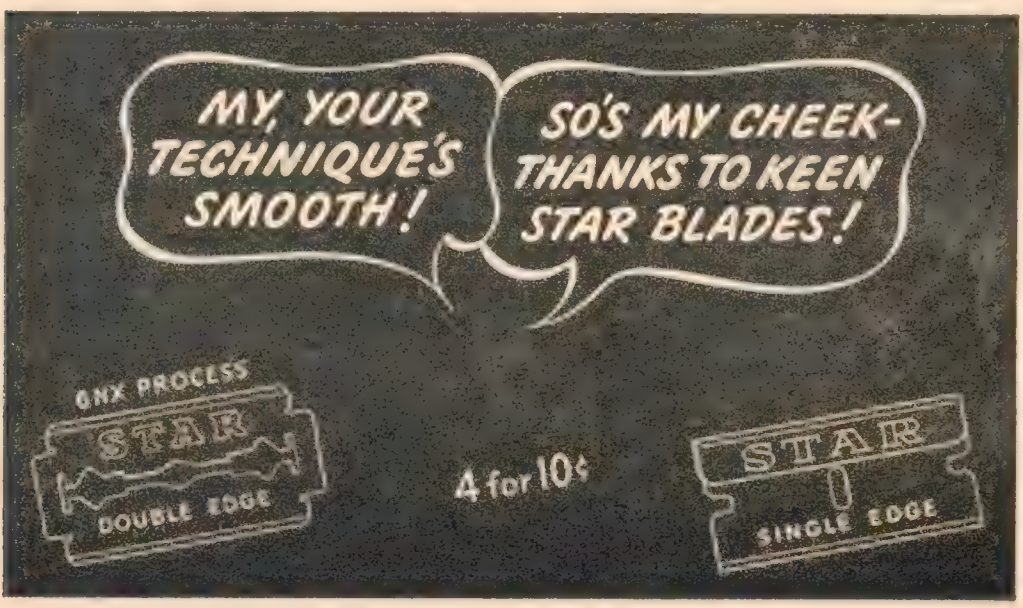
"Preachers cause unhappiness." The boy was darkly cryptic. He motioned Bodette onward. "I guess we'll take a chance on you," he conceded doubtfully.

The cabin was a little one-room structure of logs, built back into an excavation in the hillside; it was, strictly speaking, more cave than cabin. The entire front of the windowless building was covered with a drying steer hide. An old man sat on a rustic bench in the sunlight by the door. He wore square buckle shoes and an ancient mixed tweed coat. His hair was gathered in a queue at the nape of his neck. The oldster was engrossed in tranquil reverie, admiring a supine sow nurse her farrow of razorback piglets along the doorstep. Bodette asked politely, "Is that your grandfather?"

"No." The boy was curt. "That's my father. We're widowers." The old man arose as they approached. Painfully, Bodette dismounted. "He's wounded," the child explained. "That's what makes him move so funny."

The old man sprang into a flurry of action. He slapped his hands in excited commiseration, clucked his tongue. He danced about on light feet. "What are you waiting for, Graham?" he demanded. "Bring him inside, and take off his coat. And be quick about it." The boy said respectfully, "Yes, Graham."

Inside, the oldster tucked a thoughtful finger into the groove of his lower lip, inspected the hurt. It wasn't too bad. Small-shot from the fowling-piece



had slashed the cloth at his shoulder and laid open a ragged gash in the flesh. The old man produced a bowl of water, set the sulky child cleansing out the clotted blood. He asked his son, "What would you say, Graham?"

The boy responded, "I'd say dirt-dauber, Graham."

The oldster stared into the rafters overhead; with a broomstick he knocked an earthen wasps' nest from the ridge-pole. He put this into a pan with certain liquids and heated it in the fireplace. Bodette glanced about him; there was no light in the room other than the soft luminous glow from the embers on the hearth. The cave was frugal almost to the point of poverty—yet on the table, in the center of the room, was an enormous cake. A three-layered cake, with icing, decorated with bright bits of candy.

"That's a beautiful cake," Bodette remarked. "Who made it?"

There was a strained silence. "I made it," the old man said at last. He bent over Bodette, applied the sticky mass of moist clay, and instantly the painful throbbing of the wound ceased. The oldster got a needle and thread from a little teak box, carried Bodette's coat out again into the sunlight, and began mending the shredded shoulder.

Bodette asked with the barefaced candor of a countryman, "Are you folks feudin'?"

The oldster said throatily, "I'm not. Graham is."

The boy scraped the earth with the toe of his boot, looked skyward at a bluejay. He said stiltedly, "Those are might nice saddlebags you've got. Black with all that silver on them!"

Bodette said, "My saddlebags are brown, son." And then he turned his head.

HIS mare was in the lee of a tree-of-heaven, grazing the lush grass; where Bodette's saddlebags should have been hanging, suspended from the rings behind the saddle's cantle, was instead a brace of the showiest bags he'd ever laid eyes on. They were fine black leather, worked, and mounted with silver trim. They'd ridden behind him all night and he hadn't noticed them.

They belonged to the man with the rasping falsetto voice. Everything fitted together now. Landers' admonition to him to give the mare a good supper, the voice in the root cellar saying he had to be off and away, the mare all saddled and bridled just before the flight.

"I surely do thank you-all," Bodette said gratefully. "My arm feels a heap better already. By any chance, could you folks direct me to a place called Stiles Flat?"

They looked blank.

"It's on the Green River," Bodette prompted. "How far is the Green from here?"

The old gentleman arched his eyebrows, looked impish. "That's like asking 'how far until the next rain' or 'how far does autumn last'. A river's a river and it loops about considerably. The mouth of the Green is up on the Ohio and a good eighty miles from here. However, if you bear north by east you'll hit her just above the Barren. I should say it's a three days trip."

"How are the roads?"

"What roads?" The old man's eyes twinkled. "You won't have to fight Indians, like I did when I came out, otherwise I'm afraid it's pot luck. You go down the trail here until you come to the Frazees. There, you turn and bear three days north by northeast. Hold that tangent and you'll strike the Green."

The youngster's face was as white as a sheet. "You can't miss the Frazees," he muttered bitterly. "They got a big smart-alecky cabin and it's crawling with more little girls than a dead goat's got maggots!"

The old gentleman winced. "Graham! I, of course, am familiar with your personal attitude—but that's no way to speak before a stranger!"

"I know your attitude, too!" The boy leered. "You want to run off and leave me!"

The old man leaned forward, opened his mouth to retort. Bodette saw they were getting into a family squabble. Courteously, he changed the subject. "I'm not going to offer to pay you for

"I'm Graham McCabe," the child said truculently." And I'm proud to say I haven't got any hospitality!"

this, because I know you'd both drop dead in anger. You're like the Bodettes—you won't be beholden to anyone. But I am going to ask you to do me a favor. That's a beautiful cake you got inside. I couldn't help noticing, however, that it's a day or so old—the icing's cracking. For some reason you've made it and now you won't eat it. I want you to sell it to me. I'll give you two dollars for it."

The boy went into the cabin, returned with the cake. "How about a trade?" He assumed a haggling manner. "We'll swap it to you for those black saddlebags!" His eye lit up as he stared at them in rapture.

"Don't horse-trade the stranger, Graham." His father reproved him. "Those bags, in my studied judgment, are easily worth our cabin and land. The gentleman can have the cake for nothing, if he likes. It's no good to us, is it?" The boy pretended not to hear.

Bodette, his stale cake before him on the saddle, paused at the edge of the clearing and waved good-bye. The two Grahams answered half-heartedly; an air of melancholy had fallen over the glen.

TWO hundred yards or so from the McCabes, just out of sight from the little cave-house, the path doglegged over a branch. Here, Bodette decided, was the time and place to investigate his acquisition.

He sat on the pole-bridge, hung his feet over the crystal water, and laid the black saddlebags upon his knees. Old man McCabe had been right—they were expensive. Bodette had never seen anything like them. They were hand-worked in floral designs; the buckles and flap-trims were of sterling silver. He opened the right-hand pouch and arranged its contents on the bridge beside him. Just about what any gentleman might carry with him on a long journey: a small medical kit with a vial of opium, a small bottle of styptic water for wounds, bandages, and a tortoise-shell lance, a package of tea and a small red morocco-bound volume of Voltaire. That was all.

The other pouch contained a flask of powder, a set of razors, a dirty undershirt—and a key. The key was brass and at least eight inches long; the bit alone was about two inches square. On a hunch, Bodette slipped it into his jacket pocket. He picked up the Voltaire and scanned through it. Shocked, he was about to toss it to the minnows in the brook when he observed the folded paper concealed between its pages.

He spread out the sheet and scrutinized it. It was a letter.

Dear Culp,

On your swing northward, I'd advise that you break your journey at Sherrill's Crossing and spend a few hours of your valuable time in idle gossip with Kimball, the man now stationed there.

While I have no particular reason to suspect him of downright knavery to us, yet it's either that or gross incompetence. Shipments come into Sherrill's Crossing like clockwork—but there's been a muddle in transhipments since Kimball's taken over.

I wish you'd drop in, chat with K. and make a casual invoice. We can thus learn if he's double-dealing. I'd like your opinion of him, too.

Introduce yourself as a direct representative of Jonathan Lake (whoever he is!) That's the strawman that Kimball knows as his employer.

Regards,

Jonathan Lake

Bodette turned the epistle over; it was 'backed' with a vague address: *Arnold Culp, Esquire, care of Manager, Hatton House, Natchez. Please hold.*

Gradually, the fog was lifting. Now he knew the name of the man with the sugary falsetto: Arnold Culp. Sherrill's Crossing and Stiles Flat; two X's on his mental chart.

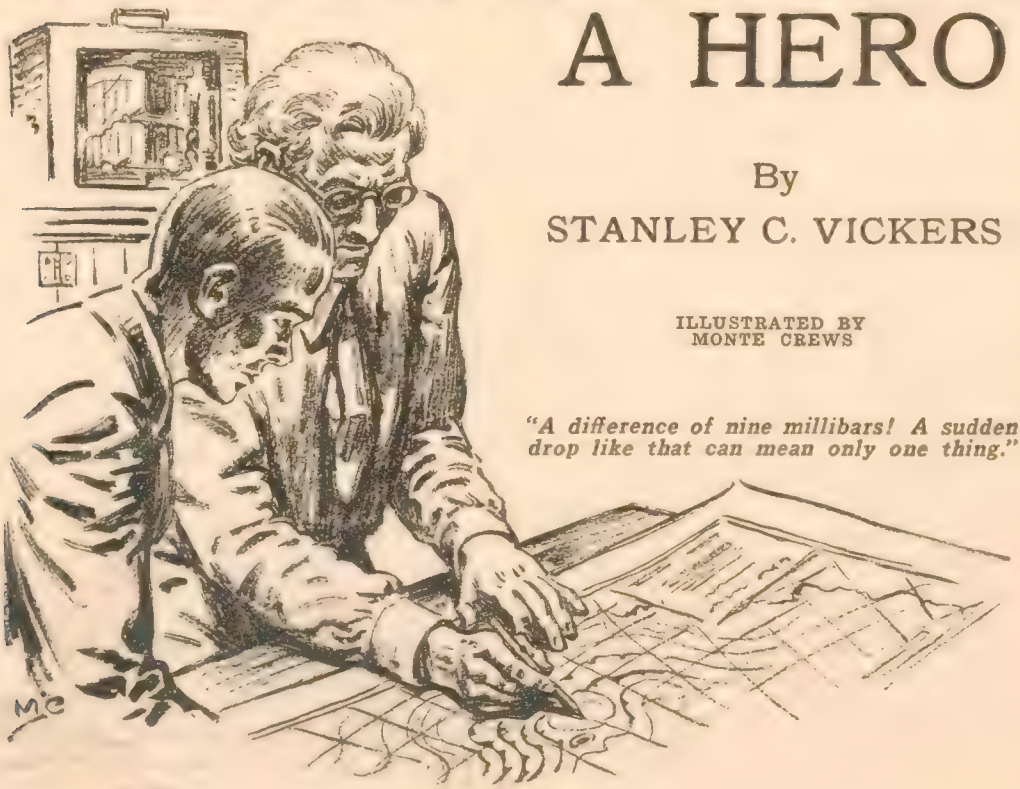
He placed the powder flask with the key, restored the remaining articles to their pouches. He tore up the letter, dropped it in the water, and set out down the trail for the Frazees.

(End of Part I)

NO CHANCE TO BE A HERO

By
STANLEY C. VICKERS

ILLUSTRATED BY
MONTE CREWS



"A difference of nine millibars! A sudden drop like that can mean only one thing."

JOHN GAFFNEY was old, as the ages of men are reckoned in wartime. Yet he had never thrilled to his work at the weather station of Aguadilla as he did now. No longer were his computations for the benefit of White Star pleasure cruises, tramp banana freighters and Porto Rican picnic planners. Civilians had to take each day as they found it. Weather was for United States naval commanders, whose observers on shipboard read their barometers and then radioed John Gaffney at Aguadilla.

Now, at six P.M., it was past time for John Gaffney to go home and leave Julian Cardoto and the wireless man, Sanguilla, in charge of the station. But the report which Sanguilla had received from the destroyer *Kearny* kept John Gaffney hunched over the weather map spread out on his desk.

The ship, three hundred miles northeast of Cuba, had reported a barometric pressure of 1002. To the young lieutenant who had handed the reading to the *Kearny's* wireless man, the information meant little except that the ship had moved into a low pressure area. There would be, perhaps, some rain and squalls. But it was exciting information to John Gaffney. Like a general mapping strategy behind the front lines, it was his job to keep posted on the tactics of the beloved enemy, the weather. And to do that, he needed constant reports from that no-man's land of gray sea where the enemy formed and shifted his battalions of wind and storm.

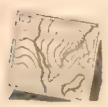
Julian leaned over his chief as he studied the map.

"You see, Julian?" John Gaffney murmured, pointing to where finely drawn lines formed irregular circles within circles. "If the *Kearny's* position was reported accurately, the reading there, according to day-before-yesterday's report from the *Wayne,* should have been

1011. A difference of nine millibars! A sudden drop like that can mean only one thing, Julian."

He leaned back in his chair and noted with pleasure that already Julian was scribbling the "Weather Flash" information on a scrap of paper. The possibility that an American destroyer could make a mistake in reporting its position or barometer reading had been properly disregarded. No, the *Kearny* had made no mistake. Instead, it had provided the clue to the peculiar alignment of high and low pressure areas which the map had assumed during the past forty-eight hours. And it had disclosed to John Gaffney and Julian the tactics which General Weather would employ for the next forty-eight hours.

It was comforting to know that such a capable assistant as Julian was ready to take over on that inevitable morning when John Gaffney would leave all weather behind.



JULIAN handed the paper to Sanguilla who, in turn, began radioing it to the government station at Key West.

John Gaffney carefully rolled up his weather map. Then he cautioned Julian, as always, "Be sure to call me if any additional reports come in."

After he had gone, Julian winked at Sanguilla. "I don't know what he carries the map with him for. He could draw it from memory."

Gaffney walked with a stiff, old man's briskness out of the building which housed the weather station and turned toward the waterfront. It was twilight. The sky was clear and the Atlantic was dark blue serenity. There was just enough unruffled ground swell to make a lap-lap sound against the dock pilings and the sides of the battered sea dories of the fishing fleet.

He paused for a moment, debating whether to stop at one of the cafes or continue home and prepare his own supper. When he hesitated, the two men who had been walking behind him did not pass him. They stopped on either side of him. He looked up from his thoughts in mild surprise, expecting some inquiry.

"Mr. Gaffney, you will walk with us and you will not make any noise." The speaker obviously was not a West Indian. He was fair skinned, as was his companion.

Although John Gaffney couldn't see it, he felt the hard metal pressing against his side. He was suddenly very annoyed. He had a great deal on his mind and not much in his pockets. He was eager to have the silly business over with, so that he could return his thoughts to meteorology.

"What do you want? Money?" he asked gruffly. He began reaching for his wallet to display the five or six dollars in it.

The gun barrel pressed harder against him, so that he gasped in pain.

"We want you to come with us. Quietly!" the spokesman ordered coolly. He took one of John Gaffney's elbows and the other man did the same. They started him walking and then dropped their hands to their sides.

John Gaffney was confused. All he could think was that they wanted to get him to some place where it would be safer to search him. "I have six dollars and a watch," he argued. "You can have it right now if—"

"Shut up, Mr. Gaffney," one of them said pleasantly.

He lapsed into sullen silence. He allowed himself to be steered along the cobblestone waterfront street. Only when they pushed him into an automobile did panic seize him. Why would street thieves know or care what his name was? Jammed between his captors in the front seat of the car, he automatically reached his hand toward the weather map which jutted out of his side pocket.

"I'll take care of that map," the man on his right said, smiling.

They left Aguadilla on the highway which led westward from the Porto Rican coast toward Mayaguez. But before reaching Mayaguez they turned off onto one of the dirt roads more suited for oxen travel than automobile. They passed clusters of five or six ramshackle native houses. And then, when they had driven for a half hour without passing any more houses, the salt smell of the

sea became strong again. The car finally stopped on a barren meadow of grass and sand.

The man on John Gaffney's right stepped out and motioned him to follow. "Come on, pop," he commanded. "We got a little walkin' to do."

The driver turned the car around and headed back toward the highway.

BEFORE John Gaffney was herded into the shack, he was able to cast a swift glance around. The moonlight disclosed a tiny cove, with the shack nestled down behind a sand dune and a small dock.

A long, speedy-looking craft was tied up at the dock. It reminded him of the days when rum-runners shuttled between the islands and the Florida keys.

Gaffney had the uncomfortable feeling that his presence here occasioned no surprise.

There were kerosene lanterns burning inside the shack. Three men dressed in rough sailors' garb were finishing a meal. When John Gaffney walked in and stood uncertainly in the center of the room, he had the uncomfortable feeling that his presence occasioned no surprise whatever.

"Have any trouble?"

The questioner was a thin, gaunt-faced man with a dirty yachtsman's hat cocked back on his head.

"No trouble," the man behind John Gaffney replied laconically. "Pete's takin' the car back to Aguadilla."

"What do you want of me?" John Gaffney asked tiredly. He hadn't eaten and he had walked a long way through sand since leaving the car. All his fear was dissolving in a listless blur.

"He had this in his pocket," the one standing near the door offered. He

walked over and laid the weather map on the table before the man wearing the yachtsman's cap. The latter unrolled it and studied it. Then he grimaced.

"This don't make much sense to me," he complained. "It shows storms and stuff, don't it?" he asked.

John Gaffney sniffed. "Yes, storms and stuff," he repeated sarcastically.

"Well, we're not interested in storms. We're interested in ships."

"Ships?" John Gaffney echoed mildly.

The man eyed his victim sharply. "Get some hot soup into him," he commanded. "We don't want him to pass out on us. We've got to go out on the water tonight."

The soup, bread and coffee made John Gaffney feel better—and worse. As his strength returned, so did the realization of his predicament. He could make only one guess as to what these men were associated with, but it was a good guess: U-boats.

They watched him idly as he ate. Then the leader pulled at his cap and glanced at his watch. He turned to the rest, who sat tilted back from the table. "Luke, get your engines started. We'll slide out in an hour if grandpa'll cooperate. If he don't, grandpa may slide out all by himself."

The three men left, grinning. John Gaffney kept eating unconcernedly.

"You got any idea why you're here?"

John Gaffney pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his lips. "No."

"O. K., I'll tell you. We got some oil and food in a boat. We're taking it tonight to a spot about two hundred miles northeast of the Silver Banks. That is, unless you decide we should take it to some other spot."

John Gaffney's heart began pounding. It was a refueling station for U-boats, all right. "What do you expect of me?" he asked again, but this time he anticipated an answer.

"We don't want to meet any ships," the man continued coldly. "Most of all, we don't want to meet any American warships. You get your weather reports at sea from American warships. They give you their positions and barometer readings. One isn't any good without the other. I know that much."

The man smoothed out the weather map between himself and John Gaffney. "Things are getting too hot on this coast. This is our last job here. When we get back, we'll drop you off in a dinghy within rowing distance of shore. You can forget us or report us. It won't make any difference." He looked up and grinned. "This all happens providing we *don't* meet any warships. First destroyer spots us, over you go. Understand?"

JOHN GAFFNEY rubbed his chin. He understood. If he cooperated, there was a chance they might return him safely. If he deliberately led them toward a destroyer, they would most certainly kill him. He leaned over the map he knew so well. If they were going out beyond the Silver Banks, proceeding northeast, there was not a chance of his becoming a hero. Not this night there wasn't. Because there would be no destroyers anywhere near the Silver Banks.

He pointed a finger at a position on the map off San Salvador, and when he spoke it was as if he were speaking to Julian. "Our last report was from the *Kearny,* longitude 72, latitude 24. The *Sheridan* reported this morning from down here, below Jamaica."

"O.K.," the man said softly. "What else is around? Any lapse of memory is going to be tough on everybody's health —but mostly yours."

He studied the map again. He bit his lips as he did when working out some problem of the atmosphere. If he were mistaken, or if . . . He looked up. "May I step out for a breath of air?"

The man shrugged. "Sure, but you'll get plenty of fresh sea air soon."

He walked to the door and stepped outside. The wind was still blowing steadily out of the northeast. *Don't shift,* he warned fiercely, for his long association with the weather had personalized it completely for him. *Don't cross me up!* He walked back into the shack and stepped briskly to the map.

The other man noticed the change and smiled grimly. The old guy was coming around O.K.

"Only other ship in the immediate waters is the *Wayne,*" John Gaffney lec-

tured. "She reported yesterday evening south of Martinique and again this morning off Trinidad."

The man nodded. He pointed to some oilskins and old sweaters on a chair. "Better wrap yourself up, pop," he advised. "We're shoving off and we might hit some dirty weather." He laughed. "I'll lay you a bet on the weather, pop."

"We'll hit some rain," John Gaffney agreed thoughtfully.

The boat was a dirty gray. She lay close to the water, about sixty feet from bow to stern, and she was powerful and quiet. They slid out of the cove and set her northeast through Mona Passage. By eleven o'clock the lights of Aguadilla had appeared and faded again. And then they were out in open water and the course was shifted a few points to north, carrying them past the mainland of the Dominican Republic.

John Gaffney sat near the wheelhouse and the man the rest called Cap stood at the helm. Shortly after midnight, one of the men appeared on deck. "Captain Von Leitish has contacted us, Cap."

"Tell him the original meeting place is still good."

The man nodded and went below.

"You might as well go below. There's a bunk for you."

John Gaffney nodded absently. He had been shivering for a long time in the face of the increasing northeast wind and the spray it whipped over the deck from the plunging bow. But before he went below he looked up once more at the sky. Scudding cloud masses were tugging up out of the north. Soon the northeast wind would slacken. The air would become dead and sluggish. Convoys already pulled in close to the Florida coast would batten down their hatches. Young able-bodied seamen on the destroyers moving into the Gulf and the Caribbean would get their first taste of what John Gaffney had been drinking in all his life—weather.

The young lieutenant on the *Kearny* who had reported his barometer reading of 1002 was going to get his rain and squalls all right.

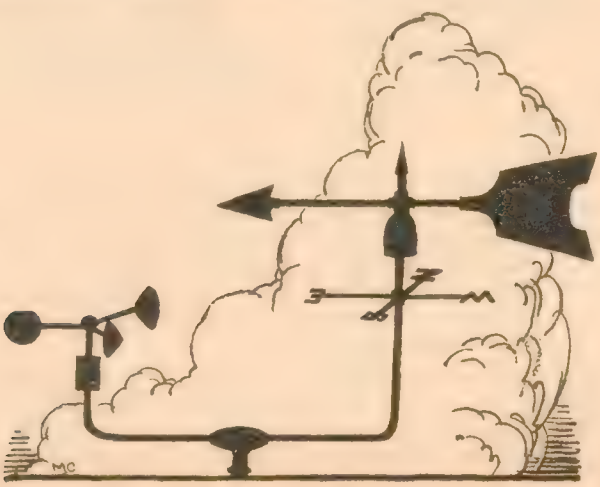
But John Gaffney had them all beat. They had all been moved toward safer waters when Key West relayed the warning that Sanguilla had flashed. But John Gaffney was going somewhere he'd always had a kind of morbid curiosity to be—the low pressure center of an incipient hurricane.

"It'll be a walloperlooza!" he sighed.

Grasping the rail tightly, he began making his way toward the hatchway. It would be tragic to go overboard now and miss the excitement, the squealing of the rats. Before he went down into the cabin, he paused for some last words with the northeast wind.

"Make it the gol-damnedest weather show you ever put on!" he commanded shrilly. "Don't swamp this oversized dinghy right away. Pick it up and whirl it around a couple of times first!"

The man called Cap stood frozen at the helm as the old man's words were hurled at him by the increasing fury of the wind.



ONLY THE VALIANT

By JAMES NORMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

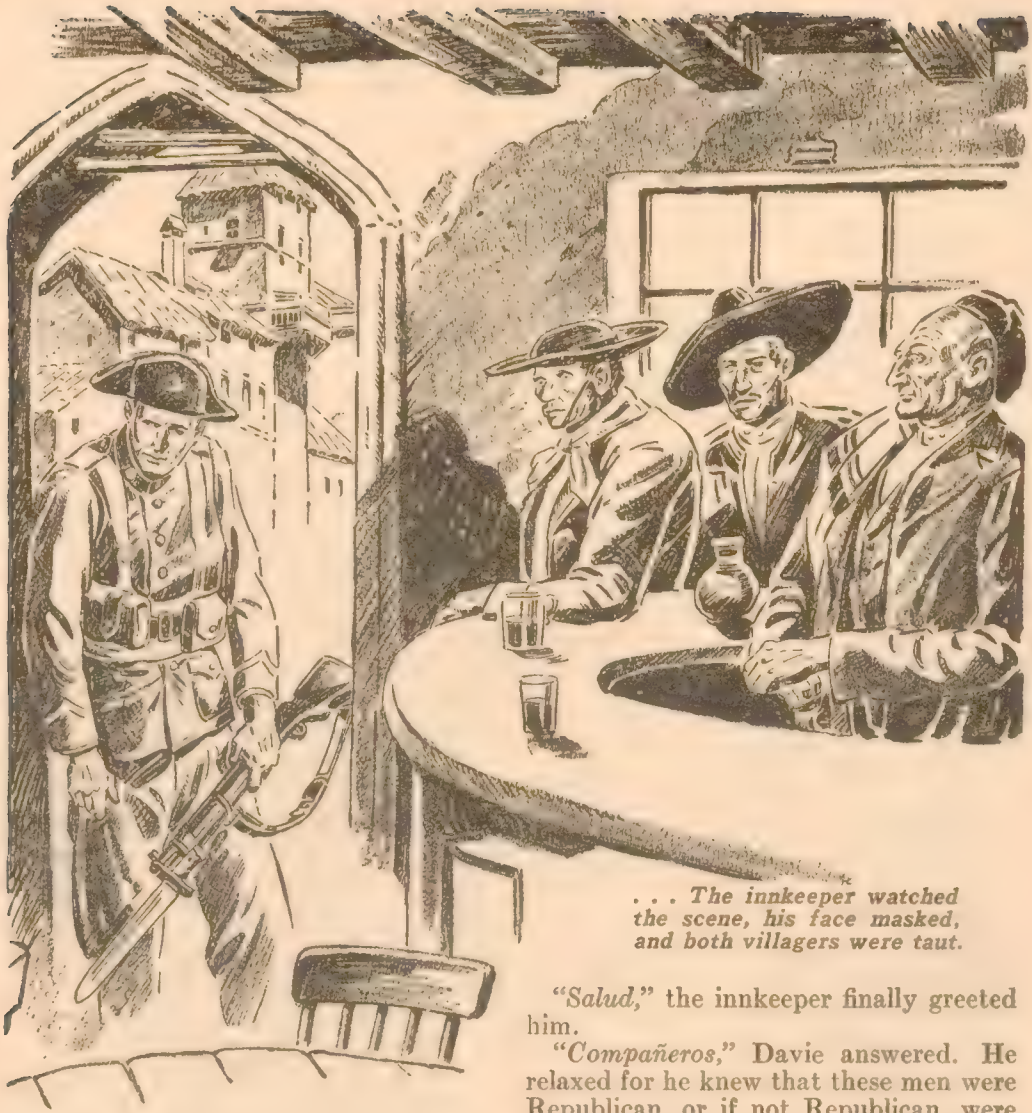
A Davie Coster Story

Holding another peeled grape on the end of his knife, the German crossed the inn . . .

THE country he had just passed through was one of the most extraordinary regions he had ever seen. From Moreda to this isolated village clinging here against the shoulders of the Spanish Sierra Nevada, the land had been scarred by tortuous *barrancas,* dotted with isolated, tawny tufa hillocks, eroded and sucked dry by the eternal Andalusian winds and sun. The hills were fantastic in shape, conical, castle-like, some like lonely fortresses. The land looked and felt as though a madman had designed it.

The fantastic atmosphere had even lodged in higher ground, in this mountain village of Huenéja. Davie Coster glanced at the name of the *fonda* he was about to enter. Spanish innkeepers liked to advertise their business, not with their own names, but with a sentiment or an allusion. This inn was called, *La Idea.*

A man who would name his establishment, half-hotel, half-saloon, with something as elusive as *La Idea* was worth knowing, Davie thought. It was the



. . . The innkeeper watched the scene, his face masked, and both villagers were taut.

place, all right, he decided. It was the name they had given him at Moreda. He would first have a drink, a bit of dry, hard bread, then he would go upstairs to Room 2 and meet José. He had no idea who José was, but the man would doubtlessly appear and give him his final directions.

He moved from the flat, brilliant sunlight into the dreary grayness of the *fonda*. His eyes moved alertly along the tiny wooden bar on his left and he nodded at the *patrón* who stood behind his bar, then toward the two customers. They were villagers. For a second he could feel their mute scrutiny come toward him, measuring him.

"*Salud,*" the innkeeper finally greeted him.

"*Compañeros,*" Davie answered. He relaxed for he knew that these men were Republican, or if not Republican, were at least friendly. "A wine," he said, and he nodded again, before going to one of the rough wooden tables to his right. He sat where he could view the door and the vivid oblong of street lying beyond.

The innkeeper brought him an earthen jar of wine and squinted inquisitively before going back to his post behind the bar. Davie had bread in his pocket. He cracked the stone-hard stuff on the table edge, then soaked it in wine. He wondered if one of the men at the bar could be José. Well, first he would relax. He wanted to get the feel of this place for there was no point in going about with one's neck stretched out a foot.

He closed his eyes wearily, and opened them almost instantly. It had been a mistake to let his lids shut. There had been no smooth, mind-easing darkness behind them. Instead, pictures had been seared there, vivid memories of the Spain he had seen before and during the Civil War. There were also pictures of the hunger and hate that spread over the land now like a seething, restless tide. He also thought of the Republican guerrillas near Toledo and the girl Maripaz who was with them. It seemed much longer than ten days since he had left the Toledo region. And it seemed longer than just a few months since he had last seen England.

HE had been sent into Spain to do a job near Toledo. He had succeeded for a number of reasons. One was his commando training in England and across the Channel. Another reason was the shape of his face, which carried more of the stripped-down leanness of the Aragonese mountaineers than the look of an Englishman. Another factor was his ability to think in Spanish. And his record—the years of fighting in Spain, and his decisive work with the Republicans.

Since then, he had been in charge of a guerrilla force in the Toledo Hills, endlessly making grim, terrible, secret warfare against Nazi groups and sympathizers who overran the country. But ten days ago, Ortiz, who worked with British Intelligence, had come to the mountains and had given him new instructions.

"*Sí, hombre,* it is a mission you are fitted for," Ortiz had explained. "Before the war, you lived at the fishing village, Roquetas, below the Sierra Nevada. You know the region, and I think you know Granada."

Davie had nodded. He knew Granada, but he was not thinking of it. Instead, his thoughts had gone toward Maripaz who had sat there, smiling, but knowing they would have to part.

"Very well," Ortiz had gone on. "You will leave for Linares immediately. At Linares I shall have a contact for you. He will furnish you with new papers, *salvo conducto, Identidad.* Your name will become Antonio Salas. From Linares you will be directed to Moreda, then Huenéja. At Huenéja you will meet José, who will direct you to a guerrilla school in the mountains. You will ask the guerrillas for help in the task you are to perform.

"Next, you will go to Granada, actually to Generalife, which is on the outskirts, as you know. At Generalife there is an internment camp where thirty-five English, American and Free French soldiers are now held. *Bueno,* they already know that an attempt will be made to release them. You will take them into the mountains, keep them there until a set date. Unless there are complications—I will explain later—you will then smuggle them to the coast. To Roquetas. A boat will come in for them. You will leave Spain with them. You are expected in England."

"How much time have I got?" Davie had asked. He had felt stunned.

"Little. I shall tell you the date tonight, before you leave."

He had looked at Maripaz finally. There were tears in her eyes. Even now, he could still see her, understanding the hurt this made in her, knowing that. . . No. His lips tightened and he frowned. This was no time for softness, no year for tears.

Suddenly he looked toward the bar, his senses warning him of a change in feeling among the villagers there. The men were staring toward the doorway. Something was wrong in the way they stared at that flat sunlight. They had become resentful and hatred showed in the somber set of their features, in the tiny flaring of their nostrils, in the ominous flashing of their eyes.

Davie came to stiff attention, listening. An automobile engine coughed somewhere outside, then died. Foosteps sounded near the door. Suddenly the villagers at the bar turned their backs upon the doorway. Their movement was frigid, stubborn. A *Guardia Civil,* with his tri-corne, glossy patent-leather hat and his Mauser rifle, entered. He posted himself by the doorway. A huge, broad-chested man in mufti followed the Civil Guard.

THE big man approached the bar, ordering grapes and cognac. He spoke Castillian Spanish, but with a faint trace of German accent. The man's gestures were very feline and suave, his dress was impeccable. He wore an English tweed suit, a silk scarf at his throat, but his bristly hair was close-cropped, German-fashion.

Davie could sense that the villagers had drawn their skins tight about their bones and away from the man. He watched while the German's large fingers delicately handled a grape; peeled it with a tiny silver pocket-knife. The grape was skewered upon the knife blade, dipped into the cognac, then it vanished between the man's full, sensuous lips. Davie was fascinated by the ritual, and strangely chilled. He knew, now, who the man was—von Grunau, Chief of the Nazi Gestapo in Andalucia.

Davie shifted his position, moving his body carefully, his head so that von Grunau might not be aware of him. He was puzzled. What was this man doing so far from Granada, and in this isolated village? He thought back quickly, wondering if his identity had been discovered at Moreda, or Linares. Then he shrugged away the feeling of tension. He realized that in this kind of work, his mind and nerves were always overkeyed. "I am Antonio Salas," he reminded himself. He leaned against the table, forcing the wooden edge against his side where his *salvo* and identity card and ration card were in his pocket. They were something to reassure himself with.

But in the next minute, reassurance trickled from his thoughts. Von Grunau turned and leaned against the bar, frowning in his direction. The German held another peeled grape on the end of his knife and it hesitated before his lips.

"*Fablehaft!*" the German exclaimed, while his lips broke into a large, pleasant smile. "Six foot one, height. . . . Seventy-two kilos, weight. . . . Brown eyes, sharp nose, Aragonese face . . . scar . . . ah. . . ."

The scar on Davie Coster's left cheek, a mark of the Civil War, burned like a livid thing.

Still holding the grape with an impeccable daintiness, the German crossed the inn. Davie noticed the discreet diamond ring on the man's finger as he pulled the chair back and sat down at the table, facing him. He observed many little things now, in this cool, even tension that came over him. The *Guardia Civil* moved from the wall. Davie read a meaning out of that. The *Guardia* could now lift his gun if he wished. The innkeeper watched the scene and his face was masked. Both villagers had edged sideways, both were alert and taut.

Von Grunau gave him a silky smile. "I'm so delighted to meet you finally, Herr Coster," he said in an English so perfect and cultured it could have worn an old school tie.

A quick, involuntary chill ran through Davie. His feelings snapped inwardly, but he managed to stare back with the blunt, incredulous wonder of a man who had been raised and bred these thirty years in the dry mountains of Aragon. Aragonese were never noted as conversationalists so he said nothing, merely waiting and feeling the German's eyes rest upon him as though he were someone the man had met at a tea. Von Grunau seemed amused.

THE knife-impaled grape slipped into von Grunau's mouth. "You are not Coster?" he asked.

Davie still forced the blunt, puzzled expression into his features. "I am Salas. Antonio Salas."

"This village?" von Grunau inquired.

"Linares."

"So, Linares. A wretched city," the German smiled. "*Bitte.* I must apologize for having mistaken you. You *are* really Spanish, then." He leaned back, staring at Davie and murmuring, "*Fablehaft,* unbelievable." He took a cigar from his pocket and cut the tip with a tiny pair of scissors that he carried in his vest. He lit the cigar and regarded Davie with vast amusement.

"I am sorry, *señor.*" He now spoke Spanish. "I imagined that you were another man. A very dangerous one. Coster. You have heard of him?"

Davie shook his head. The tension

within him remained. He sensed that the German was playing, was amusing himself. The atmosphere in the *fonda* had become stifling.

"The parallel is incredible," von Grunau said. "The same face, the same scar. Where did you get your scar? A bullet?"

"From a hoe," Davie replied bluntly. He stilled his nerves by lifting the wine jar and letting an amber jet of wine spurt into his open mouth. He wiped his lips with the back of his hand, as he had seen hundreds of Argonese men do.

Von Grunau noted that too. "Such details," he sighed. "If I thought you were Señor Coster, I would compliment you on your observance of little details. Remarkable. A real artistry. I would also compliment you for your daring activities. The raid upon our radio station at Aranjuez was completely imaginative; the most imaginative maneuver of this war. It established Señor Coster a reputation, which of course must be destroyed. You are fortunate, *señor*, that you are not this Coster. I would have to arrest you, but fortunately you are not, and . . . ah . . ." Von Grunau's slightly feline glance wavered toward the villagers at the bar. He sighed. "I would not be entirely prepared, either."

DAVIE'S eyes went toward the *Guardia Civil*. The man had relaxed and was standing close to the wall again.

"Are you working in Huenéja?" The German suddenly asked. "Or do you go on? My motor goes toward Almeria. We have room for a passenger,"

If any doubt had remained in Davie's mind that the Nazi was not sure that he was Coster, it vanished now. No Nazi in Spain would expect a Spaniard to accept such an offer unless the invitation was pressed with the aid of a gun.

Davie's answer was blunt, tempered with the stubborn pride of a Spaniard and larded with just enough information to distract the German. "I go to collect a debt from a friend at Aldiere. That is in the mountains. There is no motor road," he answered.

"At Aldiere? Perhaps I know your friend. Is it Ortega?" The German blew a round, licentious puff of smoke toward him.

Davie shook his head dumbly.

"I don't know Ortega. Only Carlo Piño. He owes me a debt."

Von Grunau moved his huge bulk so that he faced the bar. His body was quite graceful and indolent in action. "*Patrón,*" he called to the innkeeper in a tone that was suddenly harsh and administrative. "Who is Carlo Piño?"

Davie's fingers tightened upon the edge of his chair. The only sign of emotion he showed outwardly was that movement of his fingers and a slight narrowing of his lids as his gaze went between the German and the *patrón.* The trap was well timed, subtly executed. Von Grunau had turned to the innkeeper, knowing that he would be acquainted with everyone in the nearby town. The innkeeper also knew that von Grunau was a Nazi and to be feared. For Davie, there were only two vague greetings, "*Salud*" and "*Compañeros,*" linking himself and these villagers. The link was weak, he realized. But in the next moment the link became a bond of iron.

"CARLO PIÑO," the *patrón* nodded stubbornly. "My second cousin on my mother's side," he said. He addressed the two villagers. "You remember Carlo? During the Spring he came to Huenéja, looking for a wife for himself. He did not even find one in Almería."

Both villagers nodded silently. Davie's fingers let loose of the chair edge, his elbows slackened and his shoulders dropped a fraction. A swift feeling of warmth went toward these unknown, silent peasants who made the Nazi understand in this single moment what it was to have an entire people together and hating him. It was something that was being repeated in small ways and countless places throughout Europe.

Von Grunau was visibly upset by it. His lower lip jutted forth angrily. His cat eyes enlarged against these men. But he showed no fear and, finally, he gave a humorless smile. Davie watched him stand up, brush an invisible dust fleck from his sleeve, then look down.

"The details—magnificent," the German murmured in Spanish. He sighed reflectively and added, in a voice so gentle it was startling, "The next time, *señor,* I shall be better prepared. Today, our meeting was accidental. Tomorrow, I shall see that it is not."

The threat distilled the silence in the *fonda,* and it held until the German and the *Guardia Civil* had left and the sound of their motor moving up the street dispelled it. One of the villagers went to the door to watch. He came back to the bar and said, "'*Sta bueno.* The *cabrón* is gone." The men stared expectantly toward Davie Coster.

Davie came to the bar, and while shaking his head, he smiled at the *patrón.* "Much thanks," he said. "You should not have done that. The Nazi pig will check at the village of Aldiere and find there is no Carlo Piño. You will be in trouble."

The *patrón* wiped his palms upon his waist front and grinned. "*No hay de que,*" he shrugged, as though it had been nothing. "It will take them hours to reach Aldiere. When they arrive, there will be such a second cousin there." He inclined his head toward the leaner of the villagers. "Paco is sending his son over the mountains to Aldiere, *pronto.* His son will be Carlo Piño. Do you wish food now? *Huevos,* eggs, rabbit?"

Davie's face lighted. "I want a room," he explained. "Your second best."

CHAPTER II

CASEY IN THE MOUNTAINS

THE room upstairs was as plain as any *poseda* room could be. The floor slanted to one side where the building wall had settled. There was a bed with a mattress filled with hard packed straw; a hand-hewn, short-legged chair; a wooden stand with washing equipment. Davie crossed to the window, which overlooked the stony street.

The street wore a mountain drowsiness, baking beneath the clear, unhazed warmth of the sun. To his left there was a small plaza and a fountain. A few women were laundering clothes there, pounding them with rocks as women had done in Spain for ages back. A squealing pig charged erratically across the plaza with a dog attached to each

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ear. Davie thought of the old days when he might have seen a dozen pigs loitering in the square. Now there was only one, and an emaciated one at that. But it was more than they had on the plains below where the German missions, the Falangist *estraperlistas*, had sucked the country thin.

His gaze followed the yellowish-brown faces of the houses, then stopped. In the sharp, jagged shadows of a building up the street, he saw two men. He made out the gleam of the patent-leather hats —*Guardia Civiles*. He knew, instantly, that they were waiting for him to leave the *fonda* and set out across the country alone. Then they would have him. In a village as isolated as this, and as Republican, the *Guardia* were wary of the hate the people showed. They would make no arrest here.

The door opened and he turned, facing the innkeeper. The man carried a platter of fried eggs and a few bits of rabbit. He set it on the bed, gesturing toward it. "Eat."

"You are José?" Davie asked.

"After you eat, I am José," the *patrón* replied.

Davie ate. He was ravenous from the long morning hike. When he had finished, he looked at the innkeeper and realized that the man was waiting for a sign. He grinned, saying, "Ortiz is well." The faint atmosphere of restraint that had still remained was now gone. José went to the window, glanced toward the shadows where the Civil Guards waited.

"They are watching," he said. "You will have difficulty reaching the *sargento* school. You must leave over the back wall."

"I'll take care of that," Davie answered.

"*Bien.*"

"How far is it?"

The *patrón* shrugged. "In the mountains we do not measure kilometers. We measure time. A good man with wind in his chest can make it by night. You take the *burro* road toward Aldiere; at kilometer twenty, you find a trail on your left that strikes directly into the Sierra. It is very steep and long. It will lead you to the Albergue de San Fran-

He climbed skyward, his body seeking the cover of outcropping rocks as a man can do only when he has been trained to run before the live hum of bullets.

cisco. Before you reach the *albergue*, look for a stone goat-herder's hut. You will find Valenciano. He is a herder and he will show you the way. Valenciano has a long chin and fingers—he was once a baker."

Davie put the directions in the back of his mind and also that little description, "Valenciano has a long chin and fingers." He thought he understood it. He would know later.

"There is a package of food downstairs," José added, going toward the door. "And a skin of wine. Have you a cigarette?"

Davie produced a pouch of Portuguese tobacco and followed the *patrón*.

HE dropped from the wall behind the *fonda's* garden and hurried along the narrow street leading to the western edge of the village. He wondered if von Grunau or his men would also be on the path to Aldiere. No. Most likely they'd go around to Granada and approach the town through Güéjar. There was a better road from that side.

He reached the village edge without trouble and found the rocky road winding along the mountain shoulder. He had followed it perhaps a kilometer's distance when he suddenly sensed that someone was following. He glanced back, and in the twist of the road, saw two men in the distance, then the telltale glint of the sun upon patent-leather hats.

Danger had come sooner than he had wanted it. Running into von Grunau in the village was one of those accidents, unavoidable, yet disastrous. It could

change the entire shape of his mission. He quickened his pace while considering what José had told him about this road just before he dropped from the wall. The road twisted considerably for a few kilometers, then for a while it ran as straight as an arrow. That would be the danger point.

Knowing where danger stood was, at least, comforting. It left him with a strange sense of confidence and his mind worked ahead, making a neat balance of the odds. He came to a sharp bend and abandoned the road, climbing swiftly up the steep, jagged, mesquite-covered pelt of the mountain slope. He was well above the road when the echoing report of a rifle shattered the mountain quiet. A bullet hissed angrily past him, biting into the slope ahead. He bent low, moving with unslackened pace, feeling the thinness of air sear his lungs. The voices below carried quite clearly in the distance. He heard one of the *Guardia Civil* shout, "*Halto.*" A second shot sought him. Now he dropped in the brush, remaining motionless.

The Civil Guards argued down there on the road, uncertain whether they had hit him. He remained still, waiting and cautious. One of the voices lifted sharply, urging the second man, "*Anda, hombre.*" Then it was as he wanted it. He heard the men crashing in the brush, climbing laboriously toward him.

Moving again, his body swiftly seeking the cover of outcropping rocks as a man can do only when he has been trained to run before the live hum of bullets, he climbed skyward. Another shot echoed through the mountains but the bullet was wild. The balance was in his favor now. They wasted time stopping to fire. And when they came forward, the weight of their boots, rifles, bullet-boxes and heavy hats wore them down. With each burning ache in his own climbing body, he was leaving them behind another meter. His own clothes —the light corduroy jacket and gray trousers of the Spanish peasant, the rope-soled, canvas *alpargata* shoes—were made for these mountains. He had counted on that advantage.

A half hour later he had lost the Civil Guards, mired them somewhere in those unfriendly mountains. He slackened his pace slightly and met the road once more. At kilometer twenty, he found the mule trail that wound steadily toward the higher Sierra.

BENDING against the face of the mountain, sweating, and raked breathless by the steepness, Davie followed the goat-herder, Valenciano. It was already dark and there was no trail that Davie could see or even sense. But he knew that they were traversing the last lap to the *sargento* school. The going was difficult along the pine-carpeted edge of the Peñones slope; it was more difficult now as they crawled through the darkness along the shoulder of the Veleta —the highest peak in the Sierra Nevada.

"*Como va?* How are you doing?" Valenciano asked. Davie knew that the stringily-built Valencian had paused in the darkness ahead, waiting. The man knew how to climb. In the last two hours since sunset, Valenciano had shown that he could walk any man to death.

"*Bueno,*" Davie replied. The muscles across the fore of his thighs were as tight and aching as harp strings.

"We will pause a second," said Valenciano.

Davie welcomed the rest. It was cool here, chilly. A dark edged breeze, gathering ice from the eternal snow crest of the Velata, came down and sang through the night-covered tops of the pines. Davie climbed the distance between himself and Valenciano and sat beside the man.

He could make out Valenciano's hunched body and hear the even suppleness of his breath, but the man's face was lost in the shadows. Its impression remained in his mind, however, for he had met Valenciano just before sunset at the stone shelter below the *albergue.* That face was lean and patient. It was old, too. Valenciano was at least sixty. He had once been a baker of fancy pastry in Valencia, of bread in the Republican army; now he was a goat-herder and guerrilla fighter in these mountains.

"How much farther?" Davie asked.

"A little, that is all." Even now, in the darkness, and while Valenciano spoke, Davie was aware that the man's fingers were moving. The old man's fingers worked among each other with a flexible restlessness as though he were kneeding dough. They might also be fingers restless to be at the throat of someone, Davie thought. The man's hatred for the *fascistas* spoke through his hands.

"Is the school large?"

"Large enough," Valenciano replied. "It cannot be too large for we must always be changing locations in the mountains. Now it is in the valley at the foot of the Veleta. Next week—," he shrugged. "But Diaz is a good *jefe,* he thinks and leads well. When I first came there were only fifteen of us. Today we have over four hundred men in the mountains."

"In one spot? Too dangerous."

"No, they are spread," Valenciano explained softly. "They do not all come under Diaz. The *sargento* school is separate. Diaz was *jefe politico* in a sergeant's school of the Republican army at Cartagena during the war against the invaders. Now he has a *sargento* school for guerrillas. Men come here from all Spain to learn. They are taught how to fire guns, make grenades, how to organize resistance in their own provinces, how to capture arms for themselves. Diaz has taught and sent men to places as far as Asturia, to the Gallegos, to the Basques."

Davie nodded in the darkness. Then there would be enough men here for his job, he thought. Good men, well trained.

"*VENGA, camarada,*" Valenciano said. He stood up, ready to go again.

"Are there fascist patrols here?" Davie asked.

The old man grunted. "In these mountains? Seldom. We always capture them. But the *fascistas* would like to find us. They send planes to look. But they do not realize we are so many. We work in four directions—down toward the coast, then raids toward the inland plains, also toward Granada as well as the east."

Davie wiped the cold sweat from his face with his beret and followed, straining and pulling over the granite shelves, sliding soundlessly over small pine-needle covered slopes of ground. They struggled against the perilous slant of the earth and the chilling night for another hour until finally, a voice halted them.

"*Quién es?*"

Davie peered into the darkness.

"Valenciano," said his companion. "And a new one."

"Come ahead." The voice now possessed a body. Davie saw the man waiting beside a huge boulder. A man wearing a sheepskin vest and carrying a short, automatic carbine. The guard passed a few words with Valenciano and remained behind when Davie and the old man went on.

Five minutes later they had dropped in quick breathless stages to a small valley. There were no lights. The wind was broken here, humming softly. Finally they came to a stone house. It had once been a mountain-climber's refuge hut.

"This is Diaz'. The headquarters," Valenciano said. He gestured toward the darkness. "The rest of the men are quartered in the caves dug against the canyon wall. There are classrooms there too, and cows, and chickens." He pushed the door open.

A feeble olive-oil lamp glowed within the plain interior of the hut. It threw its light across an uneven table where a peaked-faced man sat, poring over an orderly heap of papers and a Michelen roadmap. Davie's glance ignored the shape of the room. It was like any other mountain hut—but the man in it was not.

"*Camarada* Diaz," Valenciano said.

"Coster, *Inglés,* formerly of the *Brigadas Internacionales,*" Davie smiled. Then he saw that the man's left arm was gone, above the elbow.

Diaz' personality came toward him as a quick, definite thing. He was a small man, dark skinned, a sharp, lively face and a searching personality. His glance met Davie's with a widening luminosity, and a guarded caution. Diaz motioned toward a bench. "*Sientate.*"

Davie stared at the man and, as an Englishman, felt a twinge of old guilt. The men who were leading Republican resistance to the Fascists and Nazis in Spain were half invalids. Casualties bequeathed them by a blind world. Each minute of debate about Spain's Civil War in the League of Nations, in Parliament, at Downing Street had cost some Spaniard a wound. And it had cost the United Nations an ally, Davie was thinking grimly.

"Where do you come from? The coast?" Diaz asked.

"Toledo region," Davie answered.

"Which group?"

"Puig's—but he is dead. Killed at Aranjuez."

Diaz nodded. Davie was aware that the sharp-eyed Spaniard already knew this. The man was wary and tense. It was almost as though he were leaning forward into a wind.

"Ortiz sent me," Davie said.

"Ah, the Englishman?"

"Spanish," Davie answered. He realized that Diaz was still feeling him out. "Ortiz works for us, but he is Spanish."

Diaz smiled slightly, while the bright, searching restlessness of his eyes seemed to relax. But the eyes still studied him and he could feel the deep fire within the man. "What do the *Ingléses* wish now?" Diaz asked.

DAVIE pulled the bench forward into the vague yellow light given by the oil lamp. Valenciano was stretched upon the floor to his left, eyes shut, but listening. Davie leaned into the light, anxious to talk. He would need this man's help and he knew it would come once the problem was placed before the man and once the latter had come to trust him.

"You know the Internment Camp at Generalife, near Granada?" he began. "There are Englishmen in it, Free-Frenchmen and a few Americans. Flyers and soldiers. Some landed in Spain by accident, others were interned when they tried crossing France and Spain after being trapped on the continent at Dunkirk. These men will be released —by us."

"For fighting in Spain?" Diaz' expression quickly fired, stabbed by the hope that the Allies considered Spain as one of the possible landing points for the continental invasion.

Davie shrugged understandingly. "Perhaps, perhaps not," he answered.

"I am surprised that the English think of releasing these men," Diaz murmured with a faint touch of irony. "The English are very proper about international law, I think. International law governs the internment of soldiers, no?"

"There was a time when some Englishmen did not want to bomb Berlin," Davie smiled. "Today, it's a different cup of tea. And you remember, once a certain Prime Minister who was asked about the war here in Spain said he didn't know there was a war going on here. But ships were being bombed in the harbor at Barcelona. Well, the English can still be that way, with a slight variation. They'll say they didn't even know there were Englishmen in an internment camp. Somehow, I think the records will be lost."

The Spaniard looked pleased. "The *Ingléses* must have important reasons?" he said in an exploring tone.

"There are reasons," Davie answered quietly. "One—they are not being fed properly. Two—if the Nazis decide to take over Spain, we'll lose some good fighters. The Free French among them will probably be shot."

"*Pues?*" Diaz added. Davie looked at the man sharply and was instantly aware of the Spaniard's keenness. Diaz's eyes were full of motion and fire, and something else. They gave the impression that he had an amazingly clear-cut grasp of every move in this war despite his scant information.

Davie laughed quietly. He said: "Very well, there are other reasons. But first, I'll explain what I need. I need enough guerrillas to effect the release of the prisoners at Generalife and to guide them back here. I may have to keep the men here for a few days. Then, I'll need a larger body of guerrillas to lead these men to the coast, to Roquetas. We shall take the town and hold it long enough for a boat to come in and take the men out. It is a tough job."

"The boat will be there?"

"Yes."

"When?" Diaz asked reflectively, as though his mind were already pinning times and details of the prospective actions on a map hung in the back of his head.

"The boat will come in upon a signal," he said. "A signal I shall give." He avoided the Spaniard's stare and the question in the man's mind. He could not tell the exact date that the signal must be given. The corvette would be ready, waiting off the coast a few minutes before sunset, a dangerous maneuver in itself.

That was something he could not tell this man, nor anyone.

"THE date is set," he said, then he tapped his head, "but it is locked up. Here. Now, the real reason why we must raid Generalife. It is simple. If the invasion of the continent begins before the date I have in mind, these Englishmen and French and Americans will be more useful up here than in prison. They are deadly. If the invasion date is delayed, we ship out. The fact that a couple of dozen fighters escape from an internment camp in Spain has its value on Nazi morale right now. The Nazis are already jittery. They don't know where the blow will come from. A few men break loose here and they worry in this direction. Something happens in Holland, they worry there. They're upset as hell about Italy and they can't garrison the whole world strongly enough. Can you get me enough men for each part of the job?"

He sat back, having laid his problem before Diaz. Now he watched the Spaniard's sharp, thoughtful eyes.

"Generalife will be difficult," Diaz spoke at last. "Many *Guardia Civil* and troops barracked there."

"You have men in Granada, no? They should know the locations of the guard details at the camp."

"*No se sabe,* it is not known." Diaz shook his head. He glanced at Valenciano who still lay with his eyes shut. "You were there, Valenciano. How is it?"

Here was a dead man, singing in the mountains.

The old man opened his eyes slightly. "The guard stations are always changing," he said. Then he sat up as though to add something else. "Colonel Monzón," he suggested doubtfully.

"Monzón?" Davie jumped at the sound of the name. "From Caspé?" All at once, the question seemed foolish. The Monzón he had known wouldn't be in Spain now.

"The same one, *hombre,*" Diaz said. "He was Republican during the war. A soft one. He is now with the *fascista* army, in the Estado Mayor. But we think he might still be a little Republican. It is difficult to know, these days. He would know the guard details at the internment camp. If you could reach him."

"Too much danger," Valenciano put

in. "Monzón is an uncertain man, *un hombre muy flojo.*"

Davie agreed. "A good man, a good military tactician, but a weak Republican," he said. "I met him once or twice. The Ebro. He was losing hope then. Shortage of arms, to him, meant shortage of morale. I think—" Suddenly Davie paused.

A voice had begun singing in the darkness outside. The song was coming closer. It was rich and warm and full of loneliness. But the song rather than the voice startled him, bringing back memories of the *Brigadas*—Americans in the trenches at Jarama, singing, Americans at Albacete, at Mora de Ebro. It had been there, in those places of blood and battle and friendship that he had first heard the song:

Out of Sou' Memphis yard on the fly,
The fireman, he sez, "Yo' gotta white eye."
Well, the switchman know'd by the engin' moan
That the man at the throttle was Casey Jones.

Davie stared at Diaz and Valenciano in confusion. Only one man in Spain could sing *Casey Jones* that way. The man had sung it in the attack at Belchite, and he had been cut to ribbons by a grenade. Davie thought of Lucius Hill, the best damn machine-gunner in the Spanish war. Here was a dead man, singing in the mountains.

THE door opened and a lean, loose-shouldered Negro boy came into the light of the hut. He was wearing Spanish sandals, the gray peasant trousers and black smock of this region, but his face shone of Harlem. It was Hill.

"Luke—" Davie shouted.

The Negro stiffened as though shot. Then his broad features broke into a wide, homesick grin. He grabbed Davie, hanging to his arms. "Coster. It's really you, alive! Hell, man!"

"Right," Davie answered, his heart filling with emotion.

"Kin you still talk English?"

"Sure."

"Sit down man an' start talking. Ah's lonesome for English, any kind of English. Ah ain't heard American talked fo' four years. Go on, talk. Just say anything. Talk for an hour. Ah gets tired listenin' to myself. Go ahead, tell me the Bible if you want, just so Ah hears it in English."

CHAPTER III

GRANADA

HE had talked, not an hour, but until midnight. And he had let Lucius Hill talk also. He had heard the American boy's amazing story of four years hiding in these mountains, lonesome yet fighting on.

Lucius Hill had come to Spain directly from New York. He had never shot a gun in his life. His body was sinewy, charged with vitality, his mind was quick and he became an expert machine-gunner. He had been badly hit at the battle of Belchite. They had moved him from hospital to hospital; one had been bombed out from under him by Italian Capronis. He was still in a hospital when the war ended, stranded, and a soldier of the losing side. He had managed to get into the mountains, becoming a member of the Spanish guerrillas and an instructor in small arms at this Andalucian fighters' school.

"All Ah want is to get home," he told Davie. "Ah don' mind fightin' but Ah wants to git into an army where we gits ham fo' breakfast and Ah kin hear good American cussin'. Ah's lonesome. Hell, man, Ah's the lonesomest colored man in the world. Ah's lonesome fo' words."

"I'll see you out," said Davie.

"You mean it?" A new light had come into Lucius Hill's face. It shone in the tempered glow of the oil lamp.

Davie had explained his mission.

Now, twelve hours later, Davie Coster, Hill and three guerrillas followed Valenciano down the swift descent of the mountains toward Granada. They had traveled since dawn and Davie had had time to acquaint himself with these others—Pepe, Frico and Perico. They were all in their middle years, all gaunt,

active men, hard fighters. Men with grenades and small arms.

Warmed by the noon sun, they followed the trail downward in a leisurely fashion, some smoking figleaf tobacco, exchanging brief remarks. The path followed the swift run of the Rio Genil and its canyon. Behind them, the mountains rose sharply, snow-crested and seemingly deserted. Thirteen miles below, to the west, was Granada. Here, in the mountain silence, there was no hint of the small personal war that was being waged across the face of Spain, and yet, these mountains were its center.

Shortly after midday they halted a distance from Güéjar, a mountain village linked to Granada by the narrow-gauge Sierra Nevada Railway. "We part here," Davie instructed the men. "You follow the road. It will bring you to Granada by evening. You can use the darkness. I shall go ahead by train to feel out the towyn. We make contact again by the Paseo de Los Tristes, understand? Twenty-one o'clock." He looked at Lucius. "If I miss, you know what to do, Luke." He shook hands with each man. "*Salud,*" he said, then turned toward the bridge spanning the Genil canyon.

THE mountain train carried few passengers and the descent to Granada was uneventful save for the endless running through Alpine tunnels, switching back and forth across the river and cutting along thin ledges of the canyon.

Davie watched the play of sunlight as it reached toward the sparkling river far below. His mind was calm and set, but always working ahead. He thought of Colonel Monzón living there in Granada, perhaps living as though the war had never shattered this country. He wondered about Monzón; how strongly had the man taken sides? Which side? He would know soon.

His plans were already set. He would risk approaching the former Republican officer and attempt to enlist his cooperation. It was a long chance. Even now he felt a slight tightening of his nerves at the prospects of walking into a possible Falangist prison or into von Grunau's hands. He shrugged. That was another chance to be taken. Otherwise, he might need twenty men to release the prisoners, and twenty were too many to bring to Granada without danger of arousing suspicion.

Monzón was a very thin thread in the fabric of his plans. A very weak thread too. *Flojo,* flaccid—Valenciano had described him. But perhaps a weak thread was what he needed now. It could also serve as a weakness in the enemy's camp. He remembered Monzón as a rather austere, intellectual military man. Monzón was an army man from the days of the monarchy, trained at the Alcazar, promoted under the Republic for having remained loyal when the Civil War broke. A man who knew little about people, but much about guns and armies.

The train had passed Cenes and now it clattered beyond the close confines of the Genil ravine and burst into full view of Granada. The rich, irrigated Vega extended south and west of the city, a durable memorial to the industry of the Moors. The train cut beneath the shoulder of a hill and came to the Bomba station.

A strong sense of nostalgia came over him as he crossed the sun-drenched *paseo* and saw the lime trees facing the little station. He thought of the old, pleasant days here; the cafés, Imperial and Suizo in the Puerta Real; the dark-faced, cunning gypsies in the Albaicin quarter of town. Granada was a town to relax in, to let memories take one away. He fought down the desire to walk through the city, re-seeing old pictures. Instead, he cut through the smaller outlying streets to the right, heading toward the Campo de los Mártires just below the Alhambra hill.

Reaching Campo de los Mártires, he suddenly stopped, then drew back into the shade of a kiosk, his body tense. A large black car passed him, and in it he caught sight of von Grunau. The Nazi had not seen him for the car disappeared at the next corner. Davie frowned, realizing that he had let himself become a little too careless.

After waiting a few minutes more, he crossed the Campo and found the en-

trance of the estate where Colonel Monzón lived. A driveway led to the house set back in an orange orchard. There was a *Guardia Civil* lounging near the sentry box at the entrance of the drive. "They keep themselves well guarded here," Davie thought. "The regime of fear and hunger. Those in power had fear, the rest had hunger." He thought of the propaganda poster he had seen near the station; a half-length portrait of El Caudillo, arms folded over his chest in a Mussolini-like pose. Someone had scrawled, *"and we, too,"* in pencil beneath the picture. To stand with folded arms was the symbol of unemployment in Spain.

There was no wall around the Monzón estate so, avoiding the *Guardia* and the driveway, Davie cut through the orchard to the house. As he rapped upon the door, he held back the thin feeling of uncertainty and danger that had grown upon him. He knew, as did hundreds of underground workers in Spain, that sooner or later each man comes face to face with a situation in which no rules can help him. This was such a situation. Nothing was certain beyond the next minute. All planning must remain abeyant. Then a pale, imperious young woman opened the door and stared at his peasant clothes with disdain.

"Colonel Monzón?" Davie asked, relieved that a woman had answered the door.

"The *Señor Colonel* is not in," the woman replied. She started to shut the door.

Davie held it and squeezed into the house. "I'll wait."

THE girl looked surprised—perhaps by his use of Castilian instead of the provincial dialect a man wearing his rough clothing should use. Davie smiled at her. She was a slender woman, perfectly poised; hardly beautiful, but exquisite in a highly cultured manner.

"I am Antonio Salas," he said. "An old friend. Colonel Monzón will remember." He let his glance run past her, his senses feeling out the atmosphere in this house. The furnishing that he could see were pre-Republic, Cinquecento Florentine chairs and tables, tapestries and gilded statues.

He looked at the woman again and found her staring at him curiously. "Did you know the Colonel during the war?" she asked.

There was something wrong in the way she asked that. A faint inner voice cautioned him. He shook his head. "No. Before the war."

"At Toledo?"

"I think so."

He caught it now, the hard, rather headstrong curiosity of this woman. He could sense her coolness toward him. It was an impartial kind of coldness, trying to read his purpose here. Then she smiled; a smile she could turn off or on like hot and cold water, he imagined.

"I was in Toledo. I have no recollection of you," she said. "I am Isabella. The Colonel is my brother. He has never spoken of you. That is strange, isn't it?"

Davie's face stiffened. Finding that Monzón had a sister here startled him. It should not have done so, for now he remembered this Isabella. He had never seen her, but there had been rumors during the Civil War. She had been one of those women who had done nothing for the struggling Republic except to let herself be dined by rearguard, fashion-plate officers in the Valencia hotels. It was said that she had had monarchist leanings.

"Your brother may have forgotten me," Davie answered. "It has been a long time."

"My brother has an excellent memory. Was your name always Señor Salas? Some of us have changed names since the war." Her glance met his directly.

"My father's name was Salas," Davie replied.

"Come. You may wait here." She led the way to a small library lined with books on military subjects. He watched her movements, always swift and poised. She was a woman with a great deal of energy and fire. When they were in the library, she turned and stared at him again with amused appraisal.

"You can stop lying now," she said. "You are a Republican, but I do not

mind. I think you are very interesting." He felt her eyes run over his face, feeling out the lines of stubborn firmness in his lean features. "You have a strong face, *señor.* I like it."

Davie's nerves went still. This girl was abrupt and astounding, he thought. He felt the strange interplay of wills run between himself and her; a half-physical and half-emotional involvement. Somehow, he felt as though he had been caught up and attracted by her inner restlessness and high temper. He tried to guard himself against the thing that her eyes were telling him so frankly.

He said: "And you are not Republican?"

Her eyes flashed. "No. I have no party. That is strange in Spain, eh?"

"And your brother? *Falangista?*"

"Army, but not *Falangista.*"

THAT information was something to ease up the constant tension that was in him. He moistened his lips and asked, "How is it that they have kept him? Republicans are not liked."

"He is a military, not a politician," she answered quickly. "He was one of the officers who saw that the war could not be won by the Republican rabble. He agreed to make peace. Furthermore, our family was with Franco."

"Peace or betrayal?" Davie said with irony. He did not finish saying what lay angrily within his mind for he suddenly heard footsteps behind him.

He turned swiftly and found himself facing a thin, scholarly-looking man in uniform. The man wore thick horn-rimmed glasses and his eyes were restive and luminous behind them. Davie noted the heavy gold bars clipped to the collar of the uniform.

"Señor Colonel Monzón," Davie said, and he stepped forth, shaking the Spaniard's hand. "You remember me?"

Monzón seemed confused. He frowned and glanced toward his sister. "Caspé," Davie added, knowing that the name of that city would bring swift remembrance to the man's mind—pictures of confusion, bombings, lines beginning to crack under artillery and a divisional staff operating through it all in a small villa on the outskirts of the town.

"You, you—Coster!" Monzón's eyes went wide and abruptly filled with fright.

"Antonio Salas," Davie said quickly.

"Please, I have no time for talk," Monzón said. Davie sensed how upset the man was. He also noticed that Isabella Monzón was watching with her air of poised amusement.

"I shall go to the garden," Isabella said. She smiled at Davie and left the room.

Monzón was still astonished. "What are you doing in Spain? What do you do here in Granada?" He said rapidly.

"I want your help," Davie replied bluntly.

"My help? You are a fool," the man exploded.

Davie smiled quietly. "You mean, I'm a fool to think that Spaniards will help in the fight against Hitler? Then you are a supporter of Franco and the *Falangistas,* the helpers of Hitler?"

Monzón's eyes shone behind his glasses with wide, curious wariness. "Why do you say that?"

"Because I must know. Do you still have Republican sympathies? If you don't, I'm afraid I'll have to shoot you."

The Spaniard laughed, tiredly. "I am Spanish, *muy Español,*" he said. "I am only interested in a strong Spain. During the Republic, I believed that Spain was growing strong. But Spain has never had sufficient equipment to safeguard a Republic. Even now, Spain does not have sufficient equipment to save the Generalissimo's dictatorship. Franco will eventually lose. I see no reason for endangering myself for either cause. Franco will go down with Hitler. It is inevitable. Why should one move against the inevitable? Let it happen of its own accord."

Davie's eyes met Monzón's. He sensed at once the tremendous confusion within this man. There was not much he could say. Monzón was the kind of military man who could only be as strong as the equipment he had. He was a purist. He needed a fully equipped army before he could fight.

He smiled, but without feeling any

inward effect of that smile. Monzón had soured. It had never occurred to him that a Spaniard could retreat so far as to have no sides.

"Did you ever stop to think that the Republicans now have a tremendous strength, a reserve of strength that they did not have during the Civil War?" he suddenly asked Monzón.

The question startled the Spaniard. He squared his lips doubtfully.

"You've stopped thinking, eh?" Davie went on. "There is a hatred in this country that is greater than any since Torquemada's days. You should know about Torquemada. He lived here in Granada. The hatred today is bent against all those who help the Nazis. It has unified all those who are against them. This hatred is good military equipment. And it is backed up by now by the Allied armies. That is more than we had during the Civil War, eh?"

MONZÓN did not answer. Davie gave him a little time to think. The man was a military man, he would have a hard time orientating his thoughts to consider things such as hatred and political currents as implements of war.

"What do you want of me?" Monzón finally asked.

Davie held his breath a moment and stared at the man. Was he coming around? Then he said: "There is a man interned near Generalife, an English friend, a pilot. I want to get him out, and to Algeria. You know the placement of the guards at the internment camp."

The Spaniard's mouth dropped open.

"No. I can have no part of it," he said stubbornly.

"You won't be exposed," Davie said.

"I am not interested." With that, the Spaniard turned and left the room.

Davie knew instantly that he had not won over the man. He had come very close to breaking through and gaining his sympathies, but had failed by some narrow, invisible margin. Failure now brought up swift complications and dangers. He realized that he must stop Monzón before the man turned him in to the police.

He started for the door when Isabella suddenly appeared. "So you are *Inglés?*" she said. He brushed past her, his thought bent on finding Monzón. She caught his arm. "It is not necessary," she said half tauntingly. "My brother will not expose you. If he does, the *Falangistas* will implicate him too. They are always suspicious of him."

Davie looked at her. "You were listening?"

"*Sí, señor.*"

Again he had that feeling of being caught up in her emotions, being unable to draw himself from them. She still held his arm and her dark, high-tempered glance was fixed upon him. She said, "I like you, much, *Inglés.* I think, perhaps, my brother will help you."

Davie's feelings were held and taut. "You think he'll help?"

"I shall tell him to."

"*Gracias,*" Davie murmured. He understood now why this girl's eyes were upon him, why her lips trembled ever so slightly with high running tension. He held her in his arms and kissed her. It was not the kind of kiss he would give nor get from Maripaz who had stayed back there in Toledo. This woman's kiss made him feel that it had been given in barter.

Following supper, which had been dulled by talk of the theater and the latest novels from Argentina, Colonel Monzón had gone to his library. Isabella rose and smiled at Davie Coster.

"Go with him to the library," she said. "He will give you what you want now. And you will excuse me. I am going to the theater. You will still be here, yes?"

Davie nodded. "Until tomorrow."

He went toward the library thinking that it had been an amazing evening. Throughout the entire supper there had been a careful avoidance of all talk concerning the Spanish guerrillas. It was almost as though the household of Monzón was too frightened to mention the subject.

Monzón was already at his desk and a military map of Granada had been spread there. The Colonel appeared blunt and sullen, as though he was grudgingly giving over the information.

There was something wrong in his attitude and it cautioned Davie.

"How good is this information?" he asked.

"It is good," said Monzón.

"What are you holding back then?"

The Colonel looked at him through those owlish-appearing glasses. "I do not like it," he said. "Isabella has become too interested in you. She is not an easy woman to be struck by a man. Even you."

"She has Fascist friends in Granada. Is that what worries you?"

The Spaniard nodded.

"I had that feeling," Davie smiled quietly. "But it is all right. I'm moving tonight. She thinks I go tomorrow." He glanced at his watch. It was quarter of nine. "We'll be going immediately."

Monzón opened his eyes, startled.

"We—?" he asked.

"I'm afraid it must be 'we,' Colonel. You and I. It is too dangerous leaving you behind, knowing. I'll see that you get out of Spain so you can save your skin."

Colonel Monzón's face had gone white. He pushed back from his desk and stood, his mouth trembling in anger.

"But my sister?" he gasped.

"We'll leave a note. She can catch the Lisbon train tonight."

"It is impossible to get out of Spain. You cannot even get one man out," Monzón exploded. "You are a fool. You cannot get me out also. We'll all be caught. I refuse." He reached for the bell cord to summon help.

DAVIE had crossed around to the side of the desk. He stood close to Monzón now, his hand against the man's side. The Spaniard glanced down and saw the automatic and his face blanched.

"That's right," Davie warned him softly. "Ring the bell. When your servant gets here, order your car out."

In a suite at the Washington Irving Hotel, located near the foot of the Alhambra, there was a large, unusual coffee table with a glass top. Beneath the glass a map of Southern Spain had been pressed flat. The map was German.

Señor von Grunau leaned over the table frowning slightly and tracing the names of towns that circled the Sierra Nevada region. He used a half-chewed capon leg for his pointer. He was now a little perplexed. From each of these towns—from Civil Guard and Assault Guard headquarters, from village police centers—information about the doings of Spain filed into his suite. But no trace of Coster had appeared.

His glance went to the blue-white area of the map — mountains. Nazi espionage did not extend that high. He leaned back, resting his huge body and took a bite from the drumstick.

"*Verdammte bergen,*" he swore softly.

There was a knock at the door. Von Grunau shifted his position, noted carefully that the safety was off the Mauser on the table. "*Herein, venga,*" he called.

The door opened and Isabella Monzón came in. Von Grunau's face lighted. He rose to meet her, and he kissed her while still holding the unfinished capon leg. "*Liebchen,*" he murmured.

CHAPTER IV

GENERALIFE

THE deep throaty bells of the cathedral had just sounded the hour. Now the nearby bell from the church of Santa Ana began counting out their nine tolls. Colonel Monzón drove his Renault into the Paseo de los Tristes and came to a halt.

Night had fallen but Davie was still able to make out the Albaicín quarter sloping upward to his left, a district of narrow, suspicious streets, *gitano* hovels, half-Moorish smells. To his right were the two hills, one crowned by the Alhambra, the other—Generalife.

Pepe, one of the guerrilla fighters, suddenly appeared beside the car. "The others are strung along," he explained, indicating the darkness ahead with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Get in," Davie ordered him. "Drive with the colonel to kilometer two, Avellano road. Wait there. And see that he does not escape."

Davie left the car and walked ahead until he met Lucius Hill, then Frico, Valenciano and Perico. No word passed between them here, for the *paseo* was filled with night strollers. They crossed the Agillo bridge and followed the Avellano in silence, passing beneath the hill of the Generalife itself. Above, the old Moorish summer palace with its trimmed hedges and cypress stood against the night, silent and white.

A few minutes later, Davie halted the group. They crouched together in the darkness beside the road, each man knowing that just ahead was the beginning of danger. From here, they could make out the even line of the stone wall surrounding a group of cottages—the internment camp. At the entrance, a hundred yards ahead, stood the small guardhouse.

Davie held an electric torch close to the earth and traced a small square in the ground. He poked his finger at positions on the two sides and the rear line. "The guards are here," he whispered. "One covering each wall. They must be put out of commission in ten minutes time. Perico, take the south wall; Valenciano, the east; Frico, the west. When you have finished, come over the wall, inside the camp. I shall be there. Everything must be soundless until we are within the camp."

Valenciano's restless fingers toyed with a grenade but he replaced it in his pocket. "The cord will be better," he murmured. He went with the two Spaniards, cutting silently into the darkness and off the road.

Davie and Lucius followed the road again, until they were past the entrance of the camp. Here they could see the yellow square of light showing through the window of the guard house. An Assault Guard paced the hard ground before the doorway. Just beyond was the camp gate, opened.

Without a word passing between them, Davie and Lucius removed their shoes. Then, as though the coordination between them were as instinctive and precisely regulated as their own muffled heartbeats, Lucius followed a wide path away from the guardhouse, Davie crept toward the edge of the house.

The sentry was a yard or two away, pacing slowly, whistling to himself. He was a small man, tightly built, perhaps a little nervous. Night always made men with guns nervous.

DAVIE had glanced within the house. There were five men there, asleep on cots. Their clothes were neatly folded upon chairs. He also saw a rack of sub-machine guns. Crouching now, he unloosened a three-foot length of cord and felt the weight of lead tied to one end of the cord.

A slight cough came from opposite the guard; Lucius had timed it precisely. The sentry heard it and took a step toward the darkness, his rifle sliding to his hands. The cough came again, stopping the man, holding his attention toward the darkness. Davie slipped forward, his body cat-like, smooth in motion, molding with the night as a man's body can do when it has been well trained in the precise school of the commandos.

The cord whirled — whistled thinly like an Argentine *bolo,* then lashed out, winding about the sentry's neck. Davie jerked it tight. The sentry's cry of fright died in his throat. His gun slipped from his fingers and was caught by Lucius who hurried silently from the darkness. Davie backed away, dragging the man. He had stopped struggling. It was that simple.

When Davie came back, he found Lucius in the guard house and the five guards gaping sleepy-eyed and amazed at the grinning Negro who covered them with a sub-machine gun before they realized he was there.

"Good work," he said.

Lucius grinned. "Ah'll keep 'em entertained. Jus' don't stay in there too long, brother."

"Collect the guns and guard uniforms. We'll take them out."

Davie went on, into the camp. He moved cautiously, alert against further danger. There were darkened cottages on either side. Before the war, they had been used as barracks for day laborers who came to work in the fields around Granada. He carefully turned the in-

formation Monzón had given him within his mind. In each of these houses there were five to eight internees. The third house would hold the leader of the imprisoned men. He came to the third house and stood there motionless, listening. Had the men been prepared, he wondered? There was no sound from within the house.

Lieutenant Means' face looked hard, and somewhat amused. The man turned and spoke quietly toward the darkness. "Hick, Kelly, it is time. Round the chaps out."

"Bloody dark, isn't it," another voice broke in, and Davie felt two men brush past him and step through the door. They vanished toward the other houses.

The cord lashed out, wound about the sentry's neck. Davie jerked it tight.

Suddenly, he felt that the door had opened slightly. Then a voice came to him softly.

"English?"

"Who is it?" Davie asked, his voice as thin as the night air.

"Lieutenant Means, R.A.F."

Davie stepped into the doorway. In the faint light from the stars, he made out the thin, long shape of the man.

"You English?" Lieutenant Means asked.

"Quite," Davie replied. "Montbatten's crowd."

"How many of you."

"Myself, an American and four Spanish."

"Really!" Davie sensed the surprise in the R.A.F. man.

HE and Means stood outside now, both motionless, waiting while men slipped through the darkness and gathered about. Davie glanced at his watch. Ten minutes or a little more had elapsed.

Then Valenciano appeared. "The wall guards are silenced," he reported. Kelly, an American internee, spoke to Means. "All here," he said.

"Break in groups of seven," Davie instructed the men. "We'll have to separate, going into the hills. One of my men will guide each squad. When you get to the gate, halt a moment. There will be guns there to take. Ready?" He repeated it in French.

The men filed by toward the gate, an anxious, wary little army. Davie was impressed by the quickness with which they had gathered, by their silence and their eagerness to act. They were men who would, for a number of hours, be moving blindly toward freedom. He had seen this kind of men before, and this spirit. He remembered the boys who had struggled blindly through darkness, breathlessly over the Pyrenees, fixing their trust upon unnamed mountain guides so that they might come into Spain to wage the first battle for freedom in this war.

At the gate they picked up the weapons that Lucius had gathered, and a number of Assault Guard uniforms. Then the men broke into squads and headed toward the dark mass of mountains to the east. Davie followed the road with one group until he found Pepe and Colonel Monzón.

"*Anda, hombre,*" he spoke to the colonel. "We have a night's hike. You'll learn what it is to be a soldier without *camiones.*"

IN the Washington Irving Hotel, von Grunau was now quite amused. He had been bored with Spain, particularly Andalusia, for he looked upon Spain as a country without culture and without delicacy. "The Moors," he claimed, "were the last civilized people in Granada." It humored him to think that the Moors were not exactly of Aryan stock.

But now there was something else to lessen the annoyance at being stationed in Granada. This woman, Isabella Monzón, was toying with him in a way that reminded him of Paris. "A la Pompadour," he smiled to himself. And he was very amused, knowing that he could crush information out of her in an instant if he so desired.

He had had such an urge the first moment she had mentioned Coster's name, but he resisted it. She was too charming to destroy, and quite clever too. "Why didn't you call me the moment this Señor Coster came to your brother?" von Grunau asked.

"Why should I have?" Isabella smiled. "I was very much impressed by the *señor.*"

"Favorably?"

Isabella shrugged her graceful shoulders. This German is a strange man, she was thinking. A proud beast. He does not even stop eating while he holds my hand and makes love to me. The thought sickened her slightly, but she continued to smile. This German held power and she wanted to share in that power. It was something that burned deeply within her. She let von Grunau kiss her again.

"The *Inglés* is handsome," she said.

"And valuable," von Grunau added. "What does he want?"

Isabella's brows arched.

"Something from my brother," she answered. "I think it is important."

Von Grunau chuckled in amusement. He plucked a grape from a bunch beside him and examined it speculatively. Then he began peeling it and speaking at the same time.

"If your brother, Monzón, should become Military Governor of the Province—" he paused, his eyes going toward the Spanish girl. Exactly. Pompadour, but with Spanish fire, he thought again. Such women were rare now; women who used their lips, their eyes, the motion of their body to make and to break men, to move nations. They used their talents like men used ballots. She would enjoy being the sister of a military governor. A step toward . . .

The telephone rang. Von Grunau picked up the receiver, annoyed. But all at once his expression changed. The buoyant look of a well fed man fell away. He listened for a few moments, then put down the receiver and turned toward the girl.

"The internment prisoners have escaped," he snapped. "Coster's work, no

doubt. Thirty-five men, from right beneath my nose."

The girl was stunned.

The German came back, picked up the Mauser from the table, weighing it thoughtfully in his palm. "My dear *liebchen,*" he smiled suavely. "Had this happened an hour later you might have been a high woman in the Province of Granada. Now, you are under arrest." He set the gun upon the table again and turned thoughtfully to his desk.

"*Verdammte,*" he murmured aloud. "Thirty-five prisoners. What is the point in releasing this many? All foreigners. I can understand it, if they are Spanish. But foreigners?" He glanced at Isabella. "Do you know why he has taken foreigners?"

The girl's eyes lifted, meeting his. They showed a fiery anger, and a fear. She said nothing.

"Answer me," von Grunau snapped, impatiently.

"He may take them to the mountains."

The Nazi's heavy lips curled disagreeably. "There is no point to that," he murmured undecidedly. For a moment he stared at the orderly top of his desk thoughtfully. Finally he selected papers from a folder and fingered through them.

"Coster, David," he read from the records. His glance skipped over Coster's Spanish war record, his English data. "Ah, so," he sighed, and read again. "1933-34, lived in Spain. Valencia, Almeria Roquetas, Malaga." He reached automatically for a grape. "Almeria, Roquetas, Malaga," he murmured. "*Das kann sein.*"

He swung his huge body to look at the table map when suddenly he stopped, his lips parting softly. Isabella stood before him, holding the Mauser toward his stomach with a firm hand.

"Do not move," she said. Her glance was full of kindled disdain.

All at once, von Grunau began to laugh. His hand slipped toward his pocket, then came forth with the gun-clip. "You see, *liebchen?*" He smiled carelessly. "Now I am afraid you must be shot for threatening an agent of the Reich."

CHAPTER V

ATTACK

DAVIE heard the voice, singing strong and clear in the mountain-locked valley of the *sargento* school, and he knew that the last group had reached this place in the mountains safely. Lucius sounded happy. His voice brought a smile to Davie's weary features.

Casey Jones gotta job in heaven,
Casey Jones was workin' double-time. . .

Davie watched from the window of the headquarters hut and saw the men straggle in, footstore and worn. They were met by Spaniards and taken to the caves to be fed and allowed to rest. Lieutenant Means, who had come with the group, entered the hut.

"Jolly fellow," he remarked tiredly. "Must have lungs like barrage balloons. He sang all the way up here."

"Has something to sing about," Davie replied. "He's going home. If we make it."

The voice outside was still strong, echoing clearly in the mountains:

The angels got together and they said it wasn't fair
For Casey Jones to go aroun' scabbin' everywhere.
Casey ups and answers, "Ah ain't scabbin' anymore.
We's workin' double-time, 'cause we gotta win the war."

Davie pushed the song from his thoughts and faced the men in the hut. His glance ran carefully over these men, so much depended on them. There was Bernardi, a Free French captain from the internment camp. Sound looking man, Davie measured him. His eyes passed over Diaz who headed the guerrilla school, then to Means. Good man too. He knew less about the Spaniards who had also gathered here, but sensed that all had a little history, some family sorrow or disaster of war that had brought them, man by man, to these

mountains, making fighters of them. Then, there was Monzón, half prisoner.

"Ten hours' rest," Davie said. "Tonight we'll move the men again, down toward the coast. The authorities will expect us to hide up here for a few days. We must keep them off balance. I'll take the liberty of laying out the operations now."

He leaned over the map upon the table, letting his finger trace southeast, over the heights of the Sierra Nevada until his nail paused upon the tiny coastal town of Roquetas. He looked at the men, continuing.

"Again, the men must go in separate units, a guide with each group. There will be sixty *guerrilleros* and the men who were interned. By dawn, day after tomorrow, Wednesday, we will gather at Villa Merle, which lies in the hills two kilometers from the center of Roquetas. Merle is a hacienda. It belongs to someone friendly and prepared. We can take cover in the groves there and rest. Wednesday evening, at about eight o'clock, we must seize Roquetas."

Dias looked startled. "In daylight?" he asked. "The foreigners will be recognized."

"That is the time," Davie replied. "My tactics are simple." He allowed his glance to lift, meeting Colonel Monzón's doubtful eyes. He smiled faintly. To take a village, Monzón would want an army. He could learn something here. "Eight o'clock is about the hour of the *paseo*. Almost everyone in the village will be strolling in the plaza. We bottle them there. Meanwhile, the *Guardia Civil* are barracked in the castle here, over a kilometer beyond the town. Eight o'clock is their mess time. There may only be one or two stationed in the village and one at the port building. The *guerrilleros* will be split: a few to cut off the coastal road, some to block the road from the castle to the village, others to hold the village."

"Where do we fit?" asked Lieutenant Means.

Davie shook his head, feeling that the R.A.F. man and the Free French Captain wanted to be in the action. "It is to be a purely Spanish operation. Guerrillas," he explained. "We will take the *telefónica*, the telephone exchange, and other points within the town. Telephone lines must be kept open to avoid suspicion being aroused beyond the village and to contact you men who will remain at the villa until we are ready. After the town is ours, then you men can come in."

"I don't see it," Means protested.

"The point is that we must be placed within Roquetas without arousing suspicions. Foreign uniforms, English and American faces, would be spotted instantly. If we have any difficulties holding our positions, then you'll have a hand in it. The operation will be difficult because it must be executed in daylight. The corvette that is to take us off will need all the night it can get for cover, once the alarm goes up the coast that we've broken through. That is the reason for the sunset raid."

He looked at the faces of the others, noting the blunt willingness and confidence of the Spanish fighters. For them, anything that promised to disrupt the operations of Nazis in Spain was worth fighting for. Nothing was too difficult. Not even death.

But he read the momentary doubt that crossed Lieutenant Means' thoughts: vague uneasiness, perhaps, about the timing, about the uncertainty of a boat being there at the exact moment, or the guerrillas successfully holding the village. Then he saw Means nod. The lieutenant was a cool one. He had put down his doubts and was placing his trust in these men he had never seen before.

V

DURING an incredible forty-hour trek, one hundred men fought their way through bleak cold nights and a blistering day. They struggled over the gigantic, spiring hog-back of the high sierras, some making the pass at Vacares, others through the Miradero gap, finally descending the long, breathless mountain steps of the Mediterranean watershed.

As Davie Coster entered this foothill country where the mountains fell precipitously to the very edge of the sea, the ground became intensely familiar.

He had lived in Roquetas before the civil war and memories of those pleasant days came back to him. It was a sweet country, rich in the scent of flowers, trees and the sea. He knew that he would never forget the fine odor of the lime trees in the square at Roquetas, nor the days of lying idly beneath an olive tree on a hillside, watching the sky and sea. These were memories he must resist or they might endanger the job he had to do.

Of the hundred men who had started over the snowy ridges of the Sierra Nevada, all but two arrived at the small orange ranch on the mountain shelf just above Roquetas. A Frenchman had slipped, breaking his leg. A Spaniard had stayed with him at a herder's refuge. The Frenchman would remain in Spain with the guerrillas. Davie envied the man's luck.

Now, Wednesday morning, the men were spread out beneath the trees, sleeping. Sentries had been posted at the borders of the grove. Davie was in the villa, which belonged to an elderly Spaniard, one of the few *haciendados* with strong Republican sympathies. The radio was on, and he listened with the inward hope that the invasion of the Continent had started. He was thinking of the Frenchman who had stayed in the mountains.

"Not quite yet," he murmured, after listening to the last Oran report. "But soon." He looked at the old *haciendado*. "Yes, we'll be back soon."

During the late afternoon he crawled to a rocky point above the village, making a final reconnaissance. Roquetas lay below him, cupped within a horseshoe of terraced hills, framed by the rising mountains behind them. It was a town with one main street, a neat plaza and a bare waterfront. A narrow ribbon of road followed the coast, cutting through the town. Another mountain road ran back into the hills and skirted the *castillo* where Civil Guards were barracked.

"The main thing will be to isolate the *castillo*," Davie announced.

"Lot of people in that town." Lucius shook his head. "It's gonna be bad. Like Malaga, last Fall. Don't want that to happen again."

"They'll be warned," Davie replied. He thought of the desperate, one-day bid for freedom Malaga had made. When the Americans had moved in on North Africa, men in Malaga had thought the invasion of Europe was being launched. They had seen the planes and the ships. They had risen against the Falangists who controlled the city, had shot the Nazi "*touristas*" there, had captured and spiked the coastal guns so the Americans could land without trouble. But no Americans had come. Then tanks were moved in against them and the Republican revolt was crushed.

IT WAS six o'clock. Davie glanced from his watch to the men gathered at the edge of the grove. He looked over the Spaniards carefully. Six were dressed in captured Assault Guard uniforms and they had sub-machine guns slung over their shoulders. The remain-

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der were like himself—peasant clothes, rope-soled shoes, berets or wide-brimmed straw hats. Some had revolvers strapped to their wrists and beneath coat sleeves. There were a number of rifles hidden in sacks. For detail, an occasional hen squawked within the sacks.

He smiled at the men with warmth and humor. "*Vayamos, hombres. Dar un paseo,*" he said. "We'll take a stroll."

The men moved off, filing down the mountain path. Davie grinned at the Americans, the English and French who would be left behind for a moment. Their faces were brown and set, a little petulant for being left out. "Be seeing you, lads," he called.

Lucius was humming softly upon the trail ahead. Once his voice broke into a snatch of song:

Casey says, "Fireman, don' you fret—
Keep knockin' at the fire-door, don't
give up yet."

The sun had almost gone from the sky when they reached the base of the hills. A wake of fire had scattered across the sky, gilding the faces of the houses a short distance beyond. Davie called a halt.

"Valenciano, go ahead," he ordered. "Be ready at eight."

The old man, who carried a bundle beneath his arm, the Republican flag, went off with ten men. They would skirt the town to the port where three men would seize the port building while the others would cut off both entries of the little-traveled coastal road. Davie gave them ten minutes, then dispatched another group—men to block each street exit from the village. A third group, burdened with a heavy machine-gun, went across a small gorge to block the narrow road between the castle and the village.

The tension built up now as he waited with the remaining men, those in uniform. In this town, where every man was known as a neighbor, suspicions would soon be aroused by the influx of strangers. The timing would have to be exact and swift. He thought of Diaz who had remained in the mountains. He would have liked this. He was a born guerrilla tactician. But Colonel Monzón. . . He'd want a tank corps and aviation. Davie wondered how Monzón felt, being left up there among the English and Americans.

He looked at his watch again and signaled the remaining men. They crossed the gorge and quickly climbed to the road. To his left and at some distance, he saw the group with the machine-gun. An arm was lifted. He knew they were prepared.

It was a half kilometer into town. His six Assault Guards marched in order, guns slung over their shoulders. Davie went a little ahead. The road now became the main street of Roquetas. He nodded briefly to the three men stationed where the houses began, then noted with satisfaction that one of the Assault Guards stayed with them, adding the fire-power of his Tommy-gun to that of their rifles.

He went ahead through the village, eyes and senses alert, feeling the shape and mood of this town. Men and women were strolling in the street, heading toward the plaza for the customary evening stroll, which was a ritual throughout Spain.

He came to the edge of the plaza. A fountain played in the center, lime trees lined the walks. Then he saw Perico and his men at the far end of the cross street. That was good. He stepped back, letting the five Assault Guards pass him.

His thoughts narrowed down to just the ones he needed. He saw everything at once now, perceptions widening, aware of little details. Voices rose in the plaza. Still no alarm. He saw two men glance at the Assault Guards, raise their brows, then speak to each other. The guards had split, one hastening toward the *Ayuntamiento* or city hall where he was met by a guerrilla in peasant dress; another crossed the plaza to the *Seguridad,* the village Civil Guard post; the other three boxed the square, guns down now, backs to walls, ready for action.

SUDDENLY a shot came from the distance; the port area. It was followed by two more reports. Davie heard surprised voices from the *Seguridad,* and

knew that his men had overcome the detail there. He turned quickly, unloosening his automatic as he entered the *telefónica* building.

His nerves had gone taut. He had his own job to do, but his senses were strung out with the other men on this raid, keyed to the pitch of their activities. A single break anywhere in the line of action could destroy the entire attack. He crossed the *entre-sol* of the small telephone exchange quietly until he came to the door of the switchboard room. There would be only one operator on at night. His glance shot toward the doorways of two other rooms. They were shut and no sound came from there.

He leaned against the control-room door and pushed lightly. A man was at the switchboard, his back to Davie. He was reading. Davie relaxed slightly. It was a good sign that no alarm had come in yet. Moving slowly toward the operator, he could hear the solid pounding of his heart. His motions were smooth and swift, his thoughts pared down, no feeling, no reaction—only rigid nerves abruptly uncoiling. The operator was still unaware of his presence. His gun came down in a short, hard arc.

The man grunted, then collapsed forward over the control board plugs. Davie dragged the man from his chair and dumped the unconscious operator in a corner where he could watch him. His glance quickly took in the room, a bare cubicle with shuttered windows, one naked electric bulb and a propaganda poster upon the wall. He sat at the control board and hastily scanned a chart there—the village directory.

From outside, he could hear no sound of confusion. The plaza seemed to have fallen in a hush. Then he heard a voice making an announcement. Probably from the *Ayuntamiento* balcony. It was Frico's voice warning the villagers to remain quiet. That this was not an invasion. That Roquetas would be abandoned in an hour.

He opened the wire to the port. A voice responded, guardedly.

"*Quién es?*"

"Coster."

"*Bueno,* here is Valenciano. Everything is well here. We can see the whole *pueblo.* It is under control."

Davie smiled quietly at the mouthpiece. Then he said. "Give the signal."

He knew that in another moment the Republican flag would unfurl in the last minutes of daylight above the port building. Out at sea, a fast corvette should be seeing that flag and be moving toward land.

Now he rang Villa Merle.

"Come in now," he gave the order. "Follow the small road that skirts the west edge of town." He could sense the excitement up there at the villa, almost as if it were carried by current over the wires. It would take them twenty minutes to reach town. They might have to wait a few minutes at the port. He turned from the switchboard and went to the windows, opening the shutter.

He heard a pistol shot, high and to the left. A Falangist sympathizer who had climbed out upon a roof. The man would be taken care of. His quick glance went across the square, noticing the attitudes of the people. There was an atmosphere of elation, as though they were startled and pleased. Those who were angered hid their feelings, not knowing what was to come. These people were largely Republican. Roquetas had always been that. They knew how to cooperate. The strength of the Fascists in the village lay in the *Guardias* at the castle. Davie smiled grimly. He held the key to the castle. No one could call it.

A call came to the switchboard and he turned to take it. He listened for a second and was amused. The incoherent voice of a woman came over the wire. "I am Señora Verguenza y Fachendón. Quickly. Let me speak with Captain Morales at the *castillo.*"

"*Porqué?*" Davie asked.

"The *rojos* have seized my husband, the mayor!"

"Later," Davie answered. He pulled the plug.

SUDDENLY it felt as though the air in the switchboard room had changed. It held a slight, warning chill. He turned swiftly, aware that danger had

thrust itself into this room. Then he stopped, his nerves frozen and numb.

Half way across the room and facing him, was the German, von Grunau. The man was elegantly dressed, the meticulous tweed sport jacket, the silk scarf, the neatly creased trousers.

"Absolutely, now. No motion, Herr Coster," von Grunau said in English.

Davie raised his hands slowly. His gun was out of reach upon the switchboard ledge, and useless. He let his glance run to the man with von Grunau. A big man too, and German. He wore civilian clothes and a black derby. He wore the derby as though he had recently traded a steel, rimless hat for this hard, felt headpiece with the curled brim.

He felt his heart sink even lower when he saw a third man, a *Guardia Civil* by the door. Then he noticed that the door of the room beyond was ajar. So von Grunau had waited there.

Von Grunau's hard, tile-like facial expression changed. He looked placid and self-satisfied. "I had not dreamed you would attempt an operation on this scale, Herr Coster," he said. "You almost had a very amazing success. But fortunately, someone saw you in Granada. It was a simple thing to tie the affair at Generalife with Roquetas. You see. Ah. . ." Von Grunau's calm, catlike glance went toward the window, then returned. "Did Monzón plan that? He should be delighted to know that his sister is . . . ah . . . deceased."

Davie watched the man, and leaned forward slightly in his chair. He felt no fear and little tension. At first, he was fascinated by a small, bizarre detail; von Grunau's fat hands in gray capeskin gloves holding a Mauser. It was if the touch of metal annoyed the German.

Then his thoughts cleared.

"Albert," von Grunau ordered the Nazi gunman with him, "call the castle. Have them send troops instantly. We hold Coster as hostage."

A quick loosening of tension went through Davie's body. So, it was von Grunau who had really been surprised by the size of the raid. The man had not been prepared. He wondered what was happening in the plaza. It was still quiet outside. Apparently yet another *Guardia* was stationed behind the closed *telefónica* entrance so the Nazi could hold this one building.

He stalled for time. "The line has been cut," he said.

Von Grunau frowned. The thought disturbed him. "Make sure, Albert. *Schnell,*" he snapped in German.

SUDDENLY Davie's attention leaped to the outer doorway, then away hastily. A head had appeared for an instant. He had seen the patent-leather *Guardia* hat, then the face under it . . . Lucius! The Nazi, Albert, pushed him aside and squatted before the switchboard. Davie's glance went back to the door for a second. He heard the Civil Guard's abrupt gasp, saw agony wrench his features, then the man pitched forward upon his face, a knife thrust in his back.

Von Grunau turned with the sound and a sickening realization must have struck through him when he saw the black shining face of the American guerrilla. Von Grunau's gun lifted, but late. The room thundered with the report of Lucius Hill's gun.

Davie had moved the instant the Civil Guard fell forward. He struck the derbied Nazi across the neck. The man started to straighten. His arm quickly circled the Nazi's shoulder, fist cutting back suddenly, crushing the wind in his throat. Panic throbbed within the man, finally giving way to limp stillness. He dropped the German. Lucius Hill stepped in, leaned down and clipped the Nazi's head with his gun butt.

Davie glanced at von Grunau's crumpled body. A bullet had cut through the scarf at his throat. "Thanks, Luke," he said.

The Negro boy wet his lips and shrugged toward von Grunau. He said, "Ah don' like 'em, cause they don' like me."

"Came just in the nick, lad," Davie murmured, covering the full depth of his feelings.

Lucius crossed to the window, his dark face troubled and anxious as he stared

out upon the plaza. Night was falling swiftly and there was danger beyond. "Don' make no difference 'bout the telephone," said Hill. "They know we're here. Must have seen our flag from the castle. They come out an' the *Guardias,* are fightin' our boys on the road. It's trouble, brother. Ah don' like it."

CHAPTER VI

BATTLE TO FREEDOM

DAVIE and Hill left the *telefónica* and surveyed the square. Twilight had settled so quickly that the clock on the Moorish-shaped church could not be seen. Suddenly a man raced into sight from the *Ayuntamiento.* He wore no pants and he was screaming in fright. It was the *alcalde,* his Lordship the Mayor.

"To the port," Davie ordered Lucius. The sight of the mayor, running across the plaza, brought a swift realization that he must have been in the *telefónica* a half hour. His men, within the village, had orders to withdraw quietly toward the port at eight-thirty. There would be some fifteen of them and they would be taken off by boat with the foreign internees. Those to the north had orders to hold the road from the castle still longer, until a flare from the port signaled that the corvette was leaving. They would then disperse, withdrawing into the mountains.

Some Republicans in the village were taking advantage of the settling darkness and the confusion. Davie saw a group of men seize the mayor. Passion and anger, righting of old wrongs, flared in the night. The *alcalde's* high-pitched scream echoed in the plaza. There was shooting now along the back streets. From the north, the more ominous sound of heavy fighting pressed toward the village. It grew in fury, a blending of rapid, machine-gun fire and blunt detonation of grenades. Its nearness disturbed Davie, filling him with a sense of disaster.

He hurried on to the port where the dark, silent shape of a corvette had docked at the small stone pier that served Roquetas harbor. Here, nervous anticipation filled the air, mingling with the strong smell of the sea. A dark file of men were clambering over the side of the boat. More men waited on the quay, milling about in the obscurity. There was a group nearby, arguing.

"Coster?" Davie recognized Lieutenant Means' clipped voice. He joined the group, noticing the man who was apparently captain of the corvette, and Colonel Monzón, Valenciano and a few other Spaniards.

"All here?" Davie questioned them.

"All ours," Means replied.

"*Camarada,*" Valenciano cut in. "It goes bad by the road. The *Guardias* push them toward the village. Our men cannot break for the mountains."

"It was a foolish tactic to split your men," Monzón remarked sourly. "You had too little fire-power."

Davie ignored the thrust. His glance went toward the corvette. It was a lean, fast ship, the kind for this job. His thoughts worked in swift, tight patterns now. He realized that the garrison at Almeria must have been warned by now. Fast, armored units would already be speeding down the coastal road to Roquetas. There was a very slim chance that he could contact the men fighting at the other end of town, withdraw them to the port, let them board under cover of fire from the ship, before armored units reached the village.

"I'll withdraw the men," he said, facing Means and the corvette's captain. "Hold the ship here as long as you can. If forces from Almeria cut us off first, shove off. Send a flare up so we'll know we've been cut and that you're going."

Davie started back toward town. Someone hurried by his side. It was Lucius Hill. "Going along," Hill said.

Davie stopped. He shook his head. "Back to the ship, Luke. We don't need two. I told you you'd get out of Spain."

"Ah ain't going unless you go."

"Go back!"

"Ah ain't." The American boy's stubbornness was so strong, it was a solid thing in the darkness. "Ah ain't never left a fight undone," he added.

Davie moved off, swiftly. He had said

nothing in reply. Hill was still beside him, running toward the town. Davie smiled quietly. Down in his heart, he knew—and Lucius understood it too—that the chance of returning to the boat barely existed. It built a warm tie between them.

They skirted the edge of town, finally reaching the vineyard on the north. Behind them, Roquetas was strangely still, as though awed by this sudden night adventure. But ahead, the battle sound swelled and the thin, pencil curve of tracers scratched brightly against the blackness.

DAVIE found his guerrillas in positions behind a stone wall that paralleled the road a short distance, then cut at an angle across the field. It was an L-shaped bastion with the machine-gun at the corner. Frico was at the gun. A younger lad from Granada fed the belt. "Gimme it." Lucius pushed the Spaniard aside and took over the gun. His face was shining.

"*Que tal, hombre,*" Frico grinned wryly.

To the left, a grenade flared angrily, shaking the ground. Davie pulled Frico down behind the shelter of the wall. He had taken the picture in at a glance. The Fascist troops heavily outnumbered his own forty men who had assembled here at this end of the town and were now strung out along the wall. The Fascists had control of the road now, and also of the ground to the northwest, the only avenue of escape into the mountains.

"The ship comes, *hombre?*" Frico asked breathlessly.

"*Sí.* It is time to withdraw. The port," Davie ordered. "Regroup the men for retreat."

He knew it would take a few minutes to contact the guerrillas strung out over this distance. Above, upon the wall, Lucius Hill played a savage burst from the machine-gun. He handled the weapon as though it were an extension of his own fingers and mind. Frico crawled away, along the wall. Suddenly the Spaniard turned and came back.

"*Mira,*" he called excitedly and pointed toward the village.

Davie's heart sank for he saw the slim blue flare of a rocket curve into the sky, then the umbrella burst of light. A second flare followed it. But Frico was still pointing toward the village itself. A second later an armored car sped toward them from the village.

"We're cut off," Davie shouted. "No retreat. We'll have to hold them."

Guerrillas at the lower end of the wall saw the need for action. Dark, mobile figures broke cover. He saw a man leap toward the road, throw a grenade and drop flat. The grenade burst ahead of the armored car, enveloping it in an orange blossom of light and destruction. The car skidded into the ditch.

"That did it, that did it, eh, *hombre?*" Frico was shouting.

"More troops will be coming from the town," Davie spoke grimly. "We're skinned!" He climbed upon the wall beside Lucius. A distance ahead, a Fascist machine-gun had complete coverage of the road. If that gun could be silenced, there was a chance of crossing the road, reaching the gorge beyond, then the foothills.

He turned to Frico. "Draw the men in, be ready to cross the road. I'm going after that nest. Move, soon as it is silenced." He squeezed Lucius Hill's arm, adding, "Keep me covered. Plenty of fire."

DROPPING beyond the wall, he crouched a moment, settling the two grenades in his belt and reloading a fresh clip in his automatic. Then he began crawling along the ditch while overhead a steady stream of lead from Hill's gun furnished his advance an armor of death. A dark shape rose on his left, running forward. Davie lifted his gun, followed the shape and squeezed. The man sprawled, not twenty yards away.

He crept more slowly now for spurts from an automatic rifle to his right began seeking him. Stones kicked up on each side. He halted, aware that something was wrong. Behind him, Lucius Hill's machine gun had stopped. He waited a few seconds. The gun did not start again. Either it had jammed, or there were no more shells. The Fascist

gun was in control now and he realized he could not move forward nor back.

He felt for the grenade at his side. Perhaps he could make a crouching run for it, enough to cover the gap ahead and toss the grenade. It was death—unpleasant but actual. . . . Then his fingers stiffened.

Something new had happened ahead. He saw a dozen men leap up toward the road from the gorge, racing to flank the Fascist machine-gun nest. They were firing as they ran. He wondered, for an instant, if the Fascists from the village had been confused in the darkness, circling their own men and attacking them. But suddenly, there was no doubt as to who the attackers were. As they closed in upon the machine-gun nest, a flurry of short-range fire filled the sky. Davie recognized Colonel Monzón among them, and Lieutenant Means.

The Fascist strong point was silenced.

Back on the wall, Frico was shouting orders and the *guerrilleros* were dropping to the road, still firing rifles as they crossed the road and retreated into the blackness of the gorge. The *Guardia Civil* fired from the field to the right with less regularity, apparently disconcerted by the surprise attack.

Davie ran ahead, joining the new group. "Get moving," he ordered.

"We've been moving," Means answered dryly. He had a bullet cut across his forehead and was pushing the blood back with his sleeve.

"What happened to the corvette?"

"Left a while ago."

Davie stared at the lieutenant and saw him smiling quietly.

"Very well, then. Move."

Davie hurried back to the wall where he saw Frico leaning over the machine-gun. The Spaniard was crying like a child and making no move to retreat with his men.

"Are you mad—" Davie began. Then he stopped. He saw the figure slumped beside the gun—Lucius. The American boy's eyes were open to the night, but sightless. There was a small, sad smile on his lips, caught and frozen there at the moment of death.

Davie heard Frico sob again. "*Muy valiente,*" the Spaniard murmured.

"Come on," Davie said. He pulled Frico away. He couldn't look at Lucius now. Lucius had not been made for death. Someone in the world was going to miss his voice and the broad, good-humored smile, and Davie knew the someone was himself.

AN hour later the *guerrilleros* reassembled in the stillness of the hills overlooking Roquetas and the dark, vast Mediterranean. The men were resting before heading into the higher sierras. Seven

Watch the Dean follow the

PARADE OF THE EMPTY SHOES

through the crimson-saturated labyrinths of Elmscroft, to pick up along the way the amazing collection of the algometer, the sawed-off shotgun and the dollies, in this newest of the perennially popular series by

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DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

The December issue is on sale now.

men among the Spanish had been lost, among them, Valenciano. Three had gone aboard the corvette with the British. And Lucius Hill's rich voice left a gap in the group on the hill.

Davie stared thoughtfully toward the village in the distance below. A fire had started at the northern end and it glowed strongly. He thought of Lucius, down there, dead. Beyond Roquitas, the sea was too dark to make out the corvette moving off toward Oran. He now thought of what this raid might have cost in men but for the brilliant charge made by the little group who had come up from the port, attacking from the gorge at the last moment.

He let his glance rest on Lieutenant Means, and on Colonel Monzón.

"Who organized the rescue group?" he asked, at last.

"*El teniente,*" Monzón said, nodding his head toward Means.

"Thanks," Davie smiled.

"Why?" Means asked. "I came back because I like it here. I wish I had known a little more about your Civil War. I think I would have liked to have been in it then. But really, it was Colonel Monzón who ran that attack down there. He knew the ground."

Davie looked at the Spanish colonel. "I thought you didn't like to fight without a full army."

Monzón's eyes glowed strangely behind his glasses. His thin, intellectual face was moist with sweat.

"Perhaps we can build an army," he said, hesitantly.

"Is that why you stayed?"

Monzón shrugged. "Yes, and to warn you," he said. "I am afraid you might be moved to visit my sister, Isabella, in Granada once again. When you were at my house I did not tell you that she is friendly with the Germans. With one —von Grunau; a very dangerous man. If you ever meet him, watch out!"

Davie nodded, staring in silence at the colonel. He had sensed in the man's voice a condemnation of his sister. It was as if he were groping for the real reason why he had remained here to fight with the guerrillas, and this was it. Davie said nothing of what the Nazi had told him down there at Roquetas. Isabella was dead. He put his arm about Monzón's shoulder and walked into the darkness.

On his other side, Lieutenant Means linked an arm in his, and the three walked together.

"What was it you chaps had here before?" Means asked. "You know—"

"*Brigadas Internacionales,*" Davie smiled.

"Right-o. It looks like we've got the beginnings of another Brigade, eh?"

BASIC DIET

BY FLORENCE BURRILL JACOBS

DECORATION BY PETER KUHLHOFF

The States, you might say, were raised upon
Pioneer git-up-and-git . . . and corn—

A hoe-cake stowed in the saddle-bag
When a restless man on a lively nag
Rode west . . . and west . . . and would sure as fate
Bed down on the soil for a rich new state—

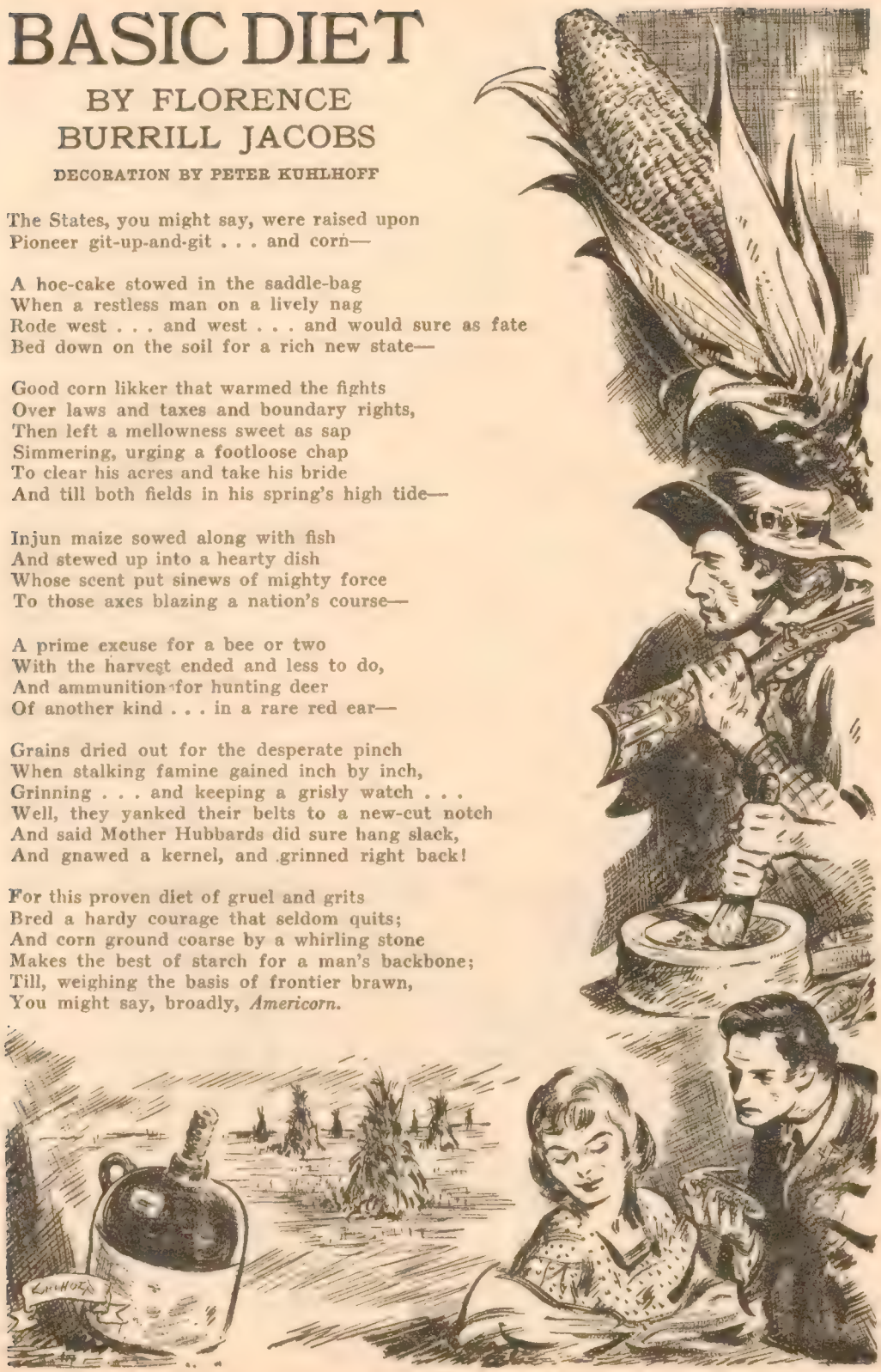
Good corn likker that warmed the fights
Over laws and taxes and boundary rights,
Then left a mellowness sweet as sap
Simmering, urging a footloose chap
To clear his acres and take his bride
And till both fields in his spring's high tide—

Injun maize sowed along with fish
And stewed up into a hearty dish
Whose scent put sinews of mighty force
To those axes blazing a nation's course—

A prime excuse for a bee or two
With the harvest ended and less to do,
And ammunition for hunting deer
Of another kind . . . in a rare red ear—

Grains dried out for the desperate pinch
When stalking famine gained inch by inch,
Grinning . . . and keeping a grisly watch . . .
Well, they yanked their belts to a new-cut notch
And said Mother Hubbards did sure hang slack,
And gnawed a kernel, and grinned right back!

For this proven diet of gruel and grits
Bred a hardy courage that seldom quits;
And corn ground coarse by a whirling stone
Makes the best of starch for a man's backbone;
Till, weighing the basis of frontier brawn,
You might say, broadly, *Americorn.*



ACCIDENT REPORT

BY BILL GULICK

SOMEBODY had made a mistake. That was evident when you read the accident report. Somebody had made a mistake, and because of it a lineman died. Baxter was the lineman's name. Sandy Baxter.

Being timekeeper for Tom Calhoun's utility crew, I saw the accident and I was the one who made out the report. I made out the report and signed it and took it to Tom Calhoun and he read it and said that was about the way it was. Then I took it to George Brandon, safety engineer for Plains States Power & Light. He said it was a good, clear report, and that he'd like to talk to me about it later.

ILLUSTRATED BY
PETER KUHLHOFF

The loop crawled upward like a writhing snake. It settled on Texas' foot and hung there.

The investigation went on for a week. Pictures were taken of the pole where Baxter had fallen into the four thousand volt wires; diagrams were drawn; witnesses, including myself, were questioned. But the only fact that ever came out clear was that somebody had made a mistake. Who? Maybe Baxter himself. Maybe Tom Calhoun. We never knew. But because of it, Sandy Baxter had died.

Later, long after everyone had forgotten except those of us who saw Sandy Baxter die, I walked into George Brandon's office and saw him staring down at my report which was spread out before him on the desk. His thin, sharp-featured face was serious, his eyes intent. He was absently tapping his temple with a lead pencil.

"Hello," I said. "Busy?"

He looked up. "Hello, Eddie. Sit down."

I did. George and I were old friends. He was a serious, intense sort of person with a faculty for losing himself completely in whatever he was doing. If he had a fault, it was his tenacity of purpose, his habit of sticking to a thing, right or wrong, until he saw it through.

He was young to be a safety engineer. Yet his youth hadn't kept him from hanging up a safety record of which older men would have been proud. But that same youth made the old-timers, men like Tom Calhoun who had learned all they knew the hard way without benefit of books and schools, dislike him. I knew this because I was in a position to see it.

George leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. "Eddie," he said, "there's no proof of carelessness on the foreman's part in this accident. I'm clearing Tom."

"I'm glad," I said.

"So now let's see what we can learn from it. How long was it from the time Baxter got into the current until artificial respiration was started?"

I COULDN'T say for sure. At a moment like that, a man's sense of time goes awry. I could remember seeing Baxter stiffen as the stuff bit him; I could remember the hoarse orders from the ground, the confusion, the men climbing up and rigging a line to lower him to the ground. How long did it take? It seemed hours.

"About five minutes," I said.

George nodded and told me that according to statistics it usually took anywhere from two to ten minutes. He opened a printed pamphlet and pored over it. "Maybe this is the answer," he murmured.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A new method of artificial respiration. You work on a man while he's still on the pole. I'm going to try it on Tom Calhoun's crew. Even though he won't like it."

I knew George was right about Tom not liking it. Tom had no use for brass hats of any kind. And he considered George the stuffiest of all brass hats. It was too bad. Because Tom was my friend and George was my friend, and I like to have my friends like each other. But they didn't, and there wasn't much you could do about it.

I lit a cigarette. George said, "Doing anything tonight?"

"Well," I said, "it's Saturday night and I've been on the wagon all week and there a little blond number who. . . ."

"This won't take long. Thought I'd drop over to Tom's house and have a talk with him. I'd like you to go along with me."

I said that was O.K. with me, and we arranged to meet at seven and I went home to wash the creosote out of my hair.

When we got to Tom's house, the usual Saturday night poker session was going on in the kitchen. Tom said howdy to me and grunted stiffly to George and opened beer for both of us. Several of the boys in the crew were sitting around the table playing stud. Tom's number-one lineman, Texas Johnson, was there. So were Dutch, the truck driver, and Big Foot and Dusty, a couple of other linemen.

George and I watched the game while we drank our beer. Texas Johnson was winning. He was as good a poker player as he was a lineman, and that's saying

something. He was a big, well muscled man, always smiling in an easy, independent sort of way. He was the kind who didn't care whether school kept or not. He had drifted around a lot working on high-line crews, always looking out for himself and doing a pretty good job of it. You could like him or not, according to the way you felt.

George waited until they'd finished a hand, then touched Tom on the shoulder. "I'd like to talk to you a minute. Tom."

Tom took a deep swig at his beer. He looked up, his heavy-featured, leathery face half resentful, half impatient. "About what?"

"Remember the Baxter case?"

A sort of tense quiet fell. Tom shoved his chair back and stood up, his big frame seeming to fill the room, his voice, accustomed to shouting orders at men fifty feet above the ground, booming like a bass drum in a closet.

"Remember! Sandy Baxter worked for me ten years. I taught him to climb his first pole. I knew his wife, his kids. I climbed poles with his brother way back when. Remember? How in the hell do you think I could forget?"

George had gone at it wrong, I knew. To Tom, every man was an individual. To George, men were cases; a life was a life, each as valuable as the next. Which, I guess, is the way a safety engineer has to look at such things. But it rubbed Tom wrong.

George went on stubbornly, "I've run across something new. It might have saved Baxter's life. I want to start training the men Monday."

"You're goin' to experiment with my crew first?"

George nodded. "Yes."

"Why mine?"

Maybe George had a reason for starting with Tom's crew. I don't know. Maybe the reason was that Tom's had been the most recent to have a fatality. Maybe not. But Tom took it that way. "Why mine?" he repeated.

George shrugged. "We have to start some place."

Tom grunted something, turned his broad back on us and sat down. George got a little red in the face. Just as we started to leave, Texas Johnson drawled to the room in general, "Some so-and-so stole my beer. If I find out who did it, there'll be the damnedest fight you ever saw."

That fight, I thought as we left the house, would be kid stuff compared to the one shaping up between George and Tom when they locked horns come Monday morning.

MONDAY, George was supposed to be at the warehouse at eight o'clock to give the crew instruction in pole-top resuscitation. He was late. Tom paced up and down across the bull-pen, looking at his watch every five minutes. At eight-thirty he stuck the watch back in his pocket for the last time and said, "Let's hit it, boys. We can't waste the whole day waiting."

So we went to work. The day was nasty. Cloudy and raw with rain threatening. Tom kept looking at the sky as we drove out to the job. We had a change-over to make on a 6900 volt circuit and it had to be done hot. You can't do hot work when it's raining. Tom was hoping to beat the rain.

When the truck stopped on a street near the edge of town, the boys piled out and started getting the tools and gear ready. Tom walked down the line a couple of blocks in each direction and checked the leads, making notes on the back of an envelope of the wiring changes to be made. He was always careful about that.

He was pointing out the hot jumpers that would have to be lifted on the nearby pole when George drove up. Tom turned and looked at him.

"You were supposed to be at the warehouse at eight."

"Sorry," George said. "I got tied up."

"Just as well," Tom grunted. "We've got work to do. Go teach your safety lessons to some other crew."

George looked up at the pole above him. The circuit was what we call a grounded circuit. One wire carried 6900 volts; the other carried no charge—a neutral wire. George said, "Are you going to kill the line?"

Tom shook his head. "No way we

can kill it. We'll lift the jumpers hot. Any objection?"

It was Tom rubbing George the wrong way this time. I could see stubbornness creep into George's eyes. "That's the way Baxter was killed, wasn't it—lifting jumpers on a hot line?"

Maybe he didn't mean it that way, but he made it sound as if lifting a hot jumper for Tom Calhoun was inviting death to make a pass at you.

Tom's face was set, his voice was flat. "You don't have to remind me of it," he said. "I was there. It's goin' to rain in an hour or two. If you make us lose a day . . ."

"Better to lose a day than a life," George snapped. He turned to the men unloading gear from the truck. "You men come over here and sit on the curb. I want your attention for a while."

He had his way. The men sat down on the curb and pretended to listen while he talked to them. Tom sat at one end of the row, saying nothing, staring down at the tips of his shoes.

George told the men a lot of things about electrical shock that they already knew; he told them new things of which they'd never heard. He didn't get over very well, it seemed to me. Yet he went on doggedly, covering every point with his characteristic thoroughness.

The men acted bored. Texas Johnson lolled back with his eyes closed as if asleep. Big Foot drew designs on his boot with a pocket knife. Tom acted as if he were listening with only one ear.

George didn't seem to notice. "The whole point I'm making," he concluded, "is that it ordinarily takes from five to ten minutes to get an electrocuted man out of the current and down to the ground where artificial respiration can be started. This new method cuts the time way down. That saving in time can mean the difference between life and death."

Then he showed us how this new kind of artificial respiration worked. It was simple enough. Instead of pushing down on a man's back as you do in the prone method, you pulled in and up on his diaphragm. That made it possible to work on him while he was still on the pole.

When each man had had his try at it, George made Texas climb a pole and pretend he was burned. Then Big Foot went up after him and did a rescue act, working on Texas upstairs, and then carrying him down astride his safety belt. George saw to it that Big Foot did the job just so.

THE rain started before he had finished his instructions. It settled into a steady, driving downpour. "That's all, boys," George said wearily, and turned to Tom. "You can have them now."

Tom shook a bucketful of water off his hat brim and snorted, "What would I do with 'em?" and told the boys to knock off for the day. I started to get in the truck.

"Want a lift to the warehouse?" George asked.

I got in his car with him. He was silent most of the way in to town. I knew that he knew he hadn't got over with the men. Tom was sore, the men were sore; I figured he was sore, too. But suddenly he turned to me and grinned. "Stubborn, aren't they?" he said.

"Yeah," I answered. But I wondered if they were any more stubborn than he was.

When a line crew has a day off, there's not much time wasted in deciding what to do. One man gets a deck of cards, another gets a bottle. And they spend the day playing cards, drinking.

That's what Texas Johnson, Dusty and Tom had been doing when I dropped by that evening. The card game had broken up and the three of them were sitting on the front porch, bulling. I sat down on the step and joined the session.

Pretty soon a car pulled up at the curb and George got out of it. "Look who's comin'," Texas muttered.

"Hello," George said pleasantly to all of us as he came up. I said hello and Tom grunted a word that might have been "howdy," but neither Dusty nor Texas spoke.

"I just came from your place, Eddie," George said to me. "I wanted to talk to you."

Texas got up and sauntered across the porch and leaned carelessly against a post. "Well, boy scout," he said, "have you thought up any more bright ideas?"

George stiffened and looked hard at Texas for a second. You could see the lineman had been drinking. He was carrying it pretty well; but he was carrying a chip on his shoulder, too.

"What do you mean?" George said warily.

The independent grin on Texas' face widened. He turned his head partly away from George and observed to nobody in particular, "Funny thing. Y'know, I've always noticed that when a man ain't got the brains to be a foreman and ain't got the guts to be a lineman, they make a safety engineer out of him."

Now, if you really want to start a scrap, it's not hard to find a way. All you've got to do is figure out and say the thing that will get under a man's hide quickest. And Texas had done a fine job of that.

George moved half a step, spun Texas around, and knocked him off the porch.

Dusty jumped up. "Why you pencil-pushin' boy scout! I'll take you apart!"

Dusty wasn't very big, so I stepped in front of him. Texas got up, spitting blood, and stared at George. "Cut it out, both of you," I said.

Texas grinned and looked at Tom. "What do *you* say, skipper?"

Tom sat there, solid, impassive. I knew that by his code a man had the right to settle his differences with his fists, any time, any place.

"I'm blind and deaf," he said. "I can't see or hear a thing."

That was all Texas wanted. He moved toward the porch, and George met him halfway. It wasn't very pretty. George was in good shape and knew something about handling his fists, but Texas outweighed him twenty pounds and was hard as a case of galvanized bolts. When you climb those big poles day in and day out, it makes you plenty man. Which was what Texas was.

George knocked him down twice. Both times Texas got up laughing, lowered his head and bulled in for more. Pretty soon George didn't have any more to give. Texas swung one from his heels, it landed, and George went down and couldn't get up.

Everybody was silent for a minute. Then Tom got up and went into the house. Texas and Dusty followed him. I helped George to his feet. His face looked pretty bad.

"Better come in and wash up," I said.

He shook his head. "I'm all right."

I helped him out to his car and slid under the wheel myself. He sat there beside me, silently holding a handkerchief to his bleeding face while I drove to his apartment. I wondered what he was thinking.

When we reached his apartment, I turned off the motor and started to go in with him. He said, "Run along, Eddie. I'll be all right."

I stood there on the sidewalk outside the building until I saw the light come on in his room upstairs. Then I walked slowly home. I figured hell would start popping in the morning.

I was wrong. We went to work the next day just as though nothing had happened. George was at the warehouse teaching another crew the same safety lessons he had taught us the day before. His face was swollen pretty bad. He said nothing about what had happened.

Texas Johnson had nothing to say, either. He didn't look much better than George. His right eye was swollen almost shut; his lips were puffed up. But if anybody noticed him or George, they never let a crack slip.

WE piled into the line-truck at eight sharp, and fifteen minutes later pulled up under the line where we had started to work the day before. Tom traced the leads again, just to make doubly sure of what he was doing. Some of those circuits can fool you if you don't check them close.

Dusty went to work three spans down the line. Big Foot climbed a pole a span east of the truck. Texas shinnied up the pole nearest the truck.

I watched him get set upstairs. He leaned back against his safety belt, hooked the hand-line around the cross-arm and shot a glance up at the two

wires above him. They were tied into strain insulators on one side of the double arm. Short, slack jumpers looped up and over the arms. It was his job to cut those jumpers.

"Hot-wire cutters," he yelled. One of the grunts ran them up to him on the hand-line. Tom craned his head back, shielding his eyes from the sun with a big hand.

"The left wire's the hot one," he called.

Texas nodded. He reached up with the hot-wire cutters and snipped the jumper. If you hadn't been watching close, you wouldn't have seen the short, biting arc of bluish-green flame that spat for a fraction of an instant. If you had seen it, you wouldn't have believed that that arc carried nearly seven thousand volts.

Texas lowered the cutters and laid them across his belt. He looked up at the other wire for a moment. Now, every power company has a rule that says you should always treat a wire as hot if you have any doubts about it. I guess Texas didn't have any doubts.

He knew that there were such things as feed-backs; he knew the simple methods by which you could safely test a wire to see if it was hot or cold. He knew these things, I say—but he didn't bother to apply them. And he didn't bother to use the hot-wire cutters. He swung one foot clear of the pole, leaned out and cut the second wire with his pliers.

And the stuff hit him hard.

I saw him freeze there—exactly the way Sandy Baxter had frozen—and I knew he was in it bad. I couldn't yell, couldn't move. I had a chunk of ice inside my chest instead of a heart.

He didn't have a chance to get loose without help. And not a man on the ground had on climbing tools. The nearest help was Big Foot, on a pole a hundred yards away.

It was Tom Calhoun who thought fastest. Some foremen have the knack for it. Cupping his hands about his mouth, he shouted down the line, "Big Foot! On the run!" Then he lumbered

George knocked him down twice. Both times Texas got up laughing, lowered his head, bulled in for more.

toward the pole and grabbed the handline.

Texas' free leg hung six or eight inches from the dangling rope. Tom stared at it. Then, making a wry face as if he were trying to remember a trick he used to do when he was a kid, he threw a running loop in the line. I held my breath, watching.

THE loop crawled upward like a writhing snake. It settled on Texas' foot, hung there. Tom jerked down hard. And suddenly Texas was loose from the wire, hanging limp in his belt. His pliers tumbled to the ground.

Big Foot came up puffing like a winded bull, and made a leap for the pole. His gaffs sank into it a good four feet above the ground. I never saw a man climb as fast as he did.

The ground crew started piling tarps on the ground, making ready to give Texas artificial respiration when Big Foot got him down. Somebody went to call a pulmotor squad. It was, I thought, a repetition of the way it had been when Sandy Baxter was burned.

Watching Big Foot climb, I got a strange feeling that I had seen this before—Texas slumped in his belt, Big Foot going up after him. Then I realized I *had* seen it before, and an idea hit me like a carload of bricks. I made a grab for Tom's arm.

"Tom—"

He was way ahead of me. "Don't take time to bring him down," he shouted at Big Foot. "Work on him up there."

George would have been proud of Big Foot if he could have seen it. Everything went just as it had gone in practice the day before. Big Foot reached a spot just below Texas and fastened his safety around the pole. He pulled Texas down until he was astraddle the belt, his back to Big Foot. Then Big Foot reached around his waist, placed his thumbs on Texas' ribs just so, pulled in and up.

I could see his lips form the numbers as he counted, as he forced the air out of Texas' lungs with the pressure of his hands, as he eased up to let the air in. I checked the count with my watch. Twelve to fifteen to the minute, George had said. Big Foot had it right, exactly right.

"Keep at it," Tom yelled. "Dusty'll be up to help in a minute."

By the time Dusty got upstairs, Texas was beginning to come out of it. He came out fighting, as victims of electrical shock so often do. It took both Big Foot and Dusty to keep him from jumping off the pole.

"Hell," Big Foot grunted as he pinned the struggling lineman's arms to his sides with a bear hug, "no man who scraps like this can be hurt bad."

Big Foot wasn't quite right. They kept Texas in the hospital for a long time. They said he'd have a bad scar or two to carry with him the rest of his life and maybe the arm would be a little stiff, but outside of that he'd soon be as good as new. He had George Brandon to thank for it. I don't know if he realized it then or not.

There was the usual investigation. I worked with George on it. We took photographs of the pole, drew diagrams. We went over the accident report a dozen times. And it seemed to add up to just one thing: somebody had made a mistake. This time, there wasn't much doubt as to who it was. This time, the finger pointed squarely at Tom Calhoun.

There in George's office one Saturday afternoon, we went over it all for the last time. George questioned me again about whether Tom had checked the leads, about whether he had followed all the safety rules. I told him all I knew. An still, it added up to just one thing.

George stared down at the report for a long time. He got up and went to the window. "I've sent for Tom," he said.

It looked like Tom was washed up. When men's lives depend on a foreman's judgment, he can't make mistakes.

"What are you going to tell him?" I said.

George shook his head. "If he had any excuse . . ."

THE buzzer purred. A secretary said Tom Calhoun was in the outer office. "Send him in," George said. "Wait outside, will you Eddie?"

Going to the outer office, I met Tom coming in. From his look I knew that he knew why he had been called in.

I waited for what seemed a long time, then Tom came out. He nodded to me but didn't speak. I studied his face and wasn't able to read a thing.

I went into George's office. He was sitting at the desk, pen in hand. "Well?" I said.

He turned to me, and there was misery in his eyes. "He wouldn't tell me a thing. He just kept saying, 'It's all in Eddie's report. All you got to do is read it and see the way it was'." He stared at the end of the pen. "What am I going to do, Eddie?"

I thought about the years I'd worked with Tom. He was a good friend. And he was an old man now so far as line work went, an old man with a black mark on his record that would make sure he never got another job in the only kind of work he knew. I shook my head.

"I don't know what to tell you," I said.

George looked down at the report. Then the old stubbornness came into his eyes and he wrote a few words across the face of it with a quick, strong hand. He slowly replaced the pen in its holder and handed me the report.

"Read it," he said.

He had written: "*Primary cause of accident—foreman's neglect of duty.*"

I handed it back to him. I couldn't say anything. He said, "That's the way it is."

The buzzer purred again. The secretary said Texas Johnson was outside. "Send him in," George said.

The door opened, closed. Texas stood just inside the threshold. His right arm was still in a sling. He was grinning a little. "Hello, Eddie," he said. He looked at George. "I never thought I'd have to thank a safety engineer for saving my life," he said.

George shook his head. "You don't."

Texas kept looking at him. "You're all right, boy scout. Only there's one thing I got to straighten you out on. It's being grapevined around that the heat's on Tom for what happened to me. That ain't right."

"A foreman can't make mistakes," George said.

"The only mistake Tom ever made was letting me work as I damned pleased. He knew I wouldn't take orders from anybody. So he never gave me any. Except once. He told me to play safe and use hot-wire cutters on both those wires. I laughed at him."

"Why didn't Tom tell me this?" George said.

"You must not know him very well. He ain't the type."

George looked at me long and hard. "Is he telling the truth, Eddie?"

"I never knew Texas to lie," I said.

Texas grinned. "Thanks, Eddie," he said softly, and left the office.

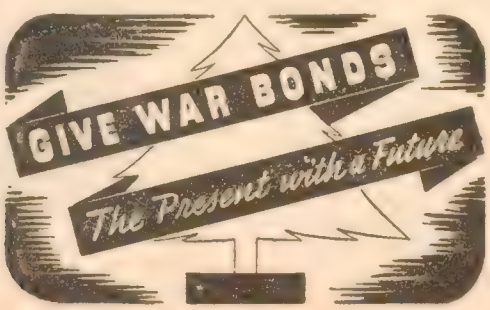
George stood there staring after him for a long time. His eyes were serious, intent. Gradually his mouth relaxed into a grin. "Eddie," he said, "I'll buy you a cup of coffee."

"Well," I said, "I've had my cup for the day. But it's Saturday afternoon and I've been on the wagon all week and I know a place where they sell beer. . ."

"Then what are we waiting for?"

He grabbed his hat and we started out the door. Suddenly he mumbled, "Wait a minute," and went back into the office.

I stood in the doorway, watching. The sound of his pen scratching rapidly back and forth across the paper was certainly a pleasant sound.



FROM THE UP-

By JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT

HARVEY was in the final stages of setting up housekeeping. Lunch kits, thermos bottles, shell cases and guns had been stowed in the blind. The inevitable air cushion had been inflated and placed—carefully and just so—on his seat. Shells were arranged within easy reach on the shelf in front of him. At last he was settled, dividing his time between bending twigs out of his line of vision and gazing longingly at a mammoth rick of ducks that covered the surface of the bay about two miles off shore.

"Now *there's* some ducks," he said, indicating the rick with a nod of his head. "Too bad we can't send Cap'n Willie out to flare 'em. Against the rules."

I nodded in agreement and looked over our set of decoys, making mental note of how the sun flashed on their wet backs. They'd look more natural after they'd had a chance to dry. Then I noticed a trim cruiser, a ruffle under her chin, bearing down toward our blind.

WIND SIDE

ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES SCHUCKER

Bill saw his old friend lying beside a poacher's duck trap, with half his head blown away.

"Wish that rick would break up," said Harvey. "Must be ten, twenty thousand ducks in that bunch. Where's all the oyster boats?"

"How about this one coming our way?" I said. "She's fast enough to break up that rick in great shape."

We watched the cruiser as she swung past the outside of the set, close enough to be within shouting distance. Harvey stood up and the man at the wheel raised an arm and shouted, "Hi, Mister Harvey! Knock 'em dead today."

Knowing that his voice wouldn't carry over the roar of the motor, Harvey waved a hand in greeting. Then he went through elaborate motions of turning the steering wheel and pointed toward the rick of ducks off shore. The man nodded, swung the wheel over, and headed for the rick.

"Who's your friend?" I inquired.

"Him? That's Bill Bascom."

"Who's Bill Bascom?"

"It's just as well you found out this way, instead of officially," answered Harvey. "He's the game warden. Didn't I ever tell you about Bill Bascom and Ed Lancaster?"

"Not yet, you haven't," I said. "Look! He's changed his course. Seems to be going up wind instead of straight at the rick."

Harvey regarded me with a pitying smile. Then he shook his head.

"My boy," he said, "when will you learn something about ducks? Don't you know by this time that ducks like to fly into the wind? Now, if I was a duck and I wanted to fly, I'd fly *with* the wind—sort of coast along and let the wind do the work. Not so, a duck. He'll bore straight into the wind, nine times out of ten. Bill knows that. He'll go along the up-wind side of that rick. That means the ducks'll flare to one side or the other, down wind. Then they'll turn and come back, most of 'em, anyway. That way, some of 'em may come by our point.

"If Bill headed straight at 'em, the whole rick would take off before he got there and head up wind, hell for leather. Then we could sit here and wait for more ducks."

I didn't attempt to defend myself. We've gunned together for years and I like to give him a prod now and then, just to hear him sound off. Harvey settled himself more comfortably and we watched Bill's boat swing around on the up-wind side of the rick.

"There they go, off on each side and down wind," said Harvey. "Better get set."

By the time I had set out a box of shells on the shelf before me and slipped two loads of sixes into my old Parker double, Cap'n Willie whispered, "Hyar come 'bout twenty broadbill. Looks like they're gonna decoy."

Harvey and I crouched in the blind, hands on guns. He, being on the right side of the blind, could watch the birds as they came in and he gave me a blow-by-blow account of their coming.

"They're past the point. . . . Looks like they might flare. . . . Keep down (just as though I *weren't* keeping down). . . . Nope, the leaders have set their wings. . . . Get set. . . . O.K., give 'em hell!"

Together we rose and swung our guns to our shoulders. I pulled down on a big drake in the lead, wings set and feet outstretched, and saw him fold and plummet downward. The little hen behind him towered and I swung the muzzle up with her, centering the pattern well ahead of her bill. She, too, collapsed in midair and fell among the decoys. I lowered my gun in time to see Harvey send a load of shot well below the tail of a drake as he towered up, flaring back with the wind. All that Harvey's shot did was hurry the drake on his way.

"Damn my dumb soul!" roared Harvey. "I wonder how long I got to shoot ducks before I learn not to shoot *at* a towering bird! Well, there's four, anyway, Willie. Better pick 'em up."

"That ain't bad," said Cap'n Willie. "Four birds out o' five shells. Not bad for a starter. But I seen you do better."

Harvey scowled in the general direction of Cap'n Willie, reloaded his time-worn Winchester pump, and settled himself on his air cushion.

"All right," I said, "what about Bill Bascom and Ed Lancaster?"

Harvey reached under the seat and produced a thermos bottle.

"Coffee?" he said.

"Half a cup," I told him, "just to smoke on."

HOT coffee on the shelf and cigarettes alight, we settled back in the blind while Cap'n Willie picked up the dead birds and brought them back to us.

"Thought I told you about that," said Harvey, knowing that he hadn't.

* * *

Well, the thing started way back yonder when those two boys were kids in school. They were about the same age, but Ed was always bigger than Bill, bigger and full of the old Nick. He used to boss the other kids around a lot.

Nothing much happened until a new girl showed up at school one day. She was a cute little trick. Pug nose, blue eyes, and blond pigtails, with her dress all clean and starched out stiff. All Bill needed was one look at her and he knew he was hooked from that time on. That day, at recess, the ruckus happened. Every country kid knows that the best way to get acquainted with a new girl is to sneak up and pull her pigtails and then run. Then she'll remember him the next time she sees him. Of course Ed, being a natural show-off, had to be the first. He wasn't satisfied to give 'em a tweak and let it go at that. He really pulled 'em, dragging her around backward a little bit before he let go. It must have hurt because Mildred—that was her name, Mildred Patchett—stood there holding the back of her head with both hands while two big tears rolled out of those blue eyes.

"Gee whiz, Ed," Bill said to him. "That ain't fair. Don't you know that hurts? Look—you made her cry."

"Aw, shut up," said Ed. Then to Mildred, "Yah, cry baby! Cry baby!"

The next thing Ed knew, Bill was on his back like a young wildcat. It was quite a fight while it lasted. Of course Ed, being a lot bigger, won, but not until Bill couldn't get up off the ground any more. Mildred watched the whole fracas and, when it was over, she turned and ran into the schoolhouse.

Well, they all grew up, as kids are bound to do. Mildred passed through the gawky stage and blossomed out into the prettiest little peaches-and-cream thing you ever set your eyes on. Bill didn't have the nerve to buzz around much. He seemed satisfied to carry her books home from school once in a while and, when they grew older, take her to a party when she'd let him. The rest of the time he stood in the background while Ed played squire—the pigtail episode and fight evidently forgotten.

By the time the three of them had reached high-school age, things were pretty much the way Ed wanted them. He referred to Mildred as "my girl" and she didn't seem to mind. He was a big, good-looking devil by that time. Bill kept plodding along, getting good marks and minding his business.

The boys were old enough to do some guiding and they knew the bay and the fishing and the ducks as well as the old-timers. Then Ed got mixed up with a cheap political crowd over in town and he decided to quit school. He could make enough money just living off the bay, so he turned in his books and took to guiding and fishing and playing poker evenings over in town. Mildred tried to reason with him but he hauled off and told her he was a grown man now and able to tend to his own affairs. For some reason she didn't get mad. Maybe she had some fool notion, like women get sometimes, about reforming him. Anyway, she kept on going around with him while Bill went ahead and graduated well up in his class at high school.

Before the big commencement dance, Bill stopped her one day on the street.

"I wanted to ask you," he said, "if you wouldn't go to the commencement dance with me. We've been in school together all these years. Seems like it would be a good way to finish up."

"Oh, Bill," she said, and I think she meant it, "I'm so sorry. I promised Ed day before yesterday."

"Ed!" exclaimed Bill. "Why, Ed ain't even *in* school any more. I thought maybe—"

"Yes, I know," she said, "but he was a member of the class and it's all right for him to come. I'll save a couple of dances for you."

Bill didn't say anything. He just

tipped his hat and walked off down the street.

That next Fall, things began to happen. Lou Owens, the game warden, got wind of the fact that ducks and venison were being sold here and there, with now and then a few quail, mostly to sportsmen who hadn't had good luck with their shooting and who wanted to take some game back to the city, game laws or no game laws. Lou didn't know where all this illegal game was coming from but he had his ideas. Then one day he found a backwater pond baited heavy with corn and a gill net spread across the bottom.

"MARK left!" whispered Cap'n Willie. "Hyar come a single."

"Your bird," said Harvey. "He's on your side."

Without moving my head, I swung my eyes to the left. Sure enough, there came a broadbill drake, evidently looking for company. He came down-wind and passed the outer decoys, well out of range, but Cap'n Willie called him—high falsetto, fluttering his tongue against his teeth—and the little drake swung around and came in over the center of the stool. I could see him turning his head this way and that, but he showed no sign of settling so I stood up and brought my gun to my shoulder. Seeing me, he flared, towering straight up. I centered the pattern about four feet above him and he climbed right into it, folding up and dropping among the decoys.

"Good shot," said Harvey. "I wish I could remember to lead a towering bird like that. How much did you give him?"

"About four feet," I said.

Harvey nodded and settled back to think about towering birds, while Cap'n Willie pushed off to get the dead bird.

"Cigarette?" said Harvey, extending his ample case. I accepted and we smoked in silence for a minute or two.

"About Bill Bascom," I reminded him. "What happened?"

"Oh, yes," said Harvey.

* * *

Now, there is no meaner way in this world to trap ducks than with a gill net. It works like this. Corn is scattered on the bottom of a shallow pond or backwater. Then the net is spread over the corn. The duck dives to pick up the corn and gets his head through the mesh. When he raises his head to come up again, his neck is held down by the fine cord of the net. He never thinks to back up. He just struggles against the net until he drowns. It takes a mighty mean man to get ducks that way.

Well, Lou lifted the net and took it back to town. At first he thought maybe he'd watch it for a while and see who showed up to pick up the drowned ducks, but he figured that a lot more birds would be drowned if he did, so he gathered up the net and brought it in. It made him pretty mad and he set out in real earnest to catch that poacher. Then, one day Lou was missing.

When he didn't show up all one night, his wife called up the sheriff and he formed a posse. They found Lou all right. He was lying in the marsh with one side of his head blown clear off and beside him was a wire box-trap with about twenty black ducks inside. The ground around the trap and inside it was covered with corn.

Of course the news spread fast. They didn't dare move Lou until the coroner arrived, and that gave Bill Bascom time to get down there. He'd known Lou Owens ever since he'd been a little shaver. As a matter of fact, Lou had taught him quite a bit of what he knew about fishing and shooting and the older man and the boy had been good friends. Now Bill saw his old friend lying beside a poacher's trap with half his head blown away.

Bill was never one to talk much. He stood there looking at Lou and figuring things out for himself. He knew the marsh well, and the shore line and the country behind it. He told me later that he reasoned it out about this way. "Now, if I'd shot Lou Owens," he asked himself, "what would I do and which way would I go so nobody'd see me come out of here?" While he stood there thinking, the answer came to him, plain as the nose on your face.

Bill didn't wait for the coroner. He started out across the marsh in the direc-

tion that *he* would have taken, mind you, if he'd been the one to do the shooting. It was tough going across the marsh, but Bill had his ducking boots on and he made it. Sure enough, be damned if he didn't find fresh boot tracks in the mud along shore where somebody'd come out of the marsh, heading for the wood lot back of Batchelder's farm. From there on, Bill said, it was easy. There was only one way for the fellow to go—through the woodlot up to the corner of the field, then up the hedgerow to the old road that leads into the back end of town.

Bill walked slowly, his eyes going over every foot of the ground. He figured that the fellow wouldn't think about his gun until he was clear of the marsh and out of sight in the woodlot. He was right about that, too. Right at the corner, where the hedgerow meets the woods, he found what he was looking for—an empty twelve-gauge shell. He took his handkerchief out of his pocket and picked it up, being careful not to touch it with his fingers. Then he stood there looking at it and his mind took him back to an evening about a month before that. He and several of the older guides had been sitting around, talking things over in McAlarney's store, where most of the boys around here buy their supplies, when Ed Lancaster came in.

"Mac," said Ed to the storekeeper, "duck season ain't far off. You got your new shells in yet?"

"Not yet," Mac told him, "but they're ordered."

"If that's the case, you must have some old shells around. Any bargains?"

"Yep. Here's a bargain. Box o' yellow-bellies, Winchester repeaters. You can have 'em for seventy-five cents."

"What size?" asked Ed.

"Fours."

"Hm. Too heavy for duck and too light for geese." He opened the box and took out one of the yellow shells to look it over. "This the only size you got in these?"

"Yep, "said Mac. "That's the last of 'em. Don't make yellow-bellies no more, at least I ain't seen none for a long time. I guess that's the last box in the whole county. Good shell, too."

"All right," said Ed. "Here's your six bits. You sold a box o' shells."

BILL remembered this as he stood there where the hedgerow joined the woodlot. The empty shell he had found was made of yellow paper and on the brass base, encircling the primer, were stamped the words, "Winchester Repeater." He took a cigarette package from his pocket, removed the cigarettes and placed the empty shell inside the paper cover. This he stowed carefully in his coat pocket.

The death of Lou Owens caused quite a stir hereabouts. The sheriff picked up Ed Lancaster and questioned him but Ed brought in three of his poker-playing friends from town and they all swore that Ed had been with them all the afternoon and night when Lou was shot. Said they'd had a long poker session and all four swore to the same story. So they turned Ed loose and that was that.

Meanwhile, Ed and Mildred had been going around together pretty steady. He seemed to have plenty of ready cash and there was talk of how ducks and venison were pretty easy to buy. Ed had built him a booby blind off that point over yonder and he was taking out ducking parties fairly regular that Fall. Then a funny thing happened.

Now, I don't know why it is, and I don't guess you do either, but women get queer ideas sometimes. For no reason that anybody could think of, Mildred decided all of a sudden that she wanted to go duck shooting. She'd heard about it all her life, she said, and if it was so much fun she'd like to try it. Ed tried to talk her out of it, but no indeed, she was bound she'd go duck shooting. So Ed said he'd take her on his next free day.

When the appointed day arrived, Ed showed up at her house about an hour before daybreak, never expecting to find her ready. By golly, she'd had her breakfast and was all dressed and set to go. She'd put on sensible clothes, too: wool shirt, wool slacks, hip boots, wool gloves, two heavy sweaters and her father's old felt hat and canvas hunting coat. Of course, the coat was a bit big and the sleeves had to be turned up some, but

that didn't matter. She looked just about as cute as a little spotted pup. She'd be an eyeful, anyway, no matter what she had on. With her dad's old twelve-gauge double under her arm, she looked pretty businesslike.

Bill had heard about the duck-shooting trip, but as usual he kept his mouth shut. The day dawned sultry, cloudy and windless. Bill didn't have a party to guide that day, so he loafed around McAlarney's store, every now and then going outside to take a look at the weather. As he had feared, a breeze sprang up about ten o'clock. Bill didn't waste any time. He cut across lots and headed for the point where he knew Ed had his blind. By the time he had reached the flats, the wind was blowing so hard he had to lean into it as he walked.

He didn't have on his boots, so he ran around the end of the marsh, through the woods, and down the bank behind Ed's blind. There, pulled up on the shore and half full of water, was Ed's boat. Then he looked out at the blind and saw Mildred waving at him and making motions.

Bill looked around for Ed, but he was nowhere in sight. He thought that was queer, but he forgot all about Ed next time he looked at the blind.

This bay is a pretty placid old lady most of the time, but you let a good strong blow come along and she can kick up her heels like a skittish young colt. The wind was really blowing by that time and the waves were rolling high and wide. Ed's blind hadn't been any too well set up—he was a lazy devil and wouldn't take the trouble to drive the posts in good and solid—and now the big waves and the wind were gradually taking it apart. The blind stood about a hundred and fifty yards off shore and Bill knew that Mildred wouldn't last five minutes if it collapsed and dropped her into that heavy sea.

Hastily stripping off his jacket, Bill picked up the side of the boat and dumped out the water. About then, Ed came running down the bank.

"What the hell'd you leave her out there alone for?" yelled Bill against the howl of the wind. "Better get out there as quick as God'll let you. That blind won't last much longer."

"How'm I gonna *get* out there?" shouted Ed. "Nobody could hold a boat against that wind. Anyway, it would be swamped before I got halfway."

"She'll drown if that blind lets go."

"I know," shouted Ed, "but what can we do? You can't get out to her now."

"The hell I can't," yelled Bill. "Get out of my way."

Mildred told me later how Bill covered that hundred and fifty yards. Somehow, he won't talk about it. First, he tied the boat painter to the back of his belt. Then he shoved the boat off shore and started wading toward the blind. On a still day, the water would be four feet deep at most, maybe five here and there. Bill hadn't gone twenty yards before the waves caught him full force. They were higher than his head, so he tried jumping up with the first one but he found he'd lose too much ground that way. The wash of the waves and the pull of the boat would drag him down-wind, clear of the blind. After that, he held his breath and ducked under, pushing his way out toward the blind, half swimming, half walking. About the only time he could make any real headway was when he was in the trough between two waves. Then he'd fight his way out a bit before the next wave caught him.

TWICE he lost his footing and disappeared. Mildred thought he was done for each time it happened, but he'd bounce up again, after a couple of waves had passed over him, spout water like a porpoise, and keep on coming. For what seemed like an hour, he fought his way inch by inch toward her. As the water grew deeper, his progress slowed somewhat, but he didn't quit. About twenty or thirty yards from the blind the water deepened off some more, cutting down his weight so that the pull of the boat was forcing him down wind. After that, most of his progress was under water, clawing along the bottom with hands and feet, now and then coming up for a breath of air. The boat-slip in back of the blind had washed away by this time and only the platform was left. All Mil-

dred could do was sit there on the floor of the blind and watch Bill fight it out.

Bill was fairly close to the blind by this time, but his movements were growing slower and slower. When Mildred was sure that he must have reached the point of complete exhaustion, he ducked under one last time and she saw the boat being pulled up toward him. When he came to the surface again, he summoned all the strength that was left in him and made a frantic scramble for the blind, managing to grab the corner upright. Dazed and half drowned, he clung there until Mildred reached out to him with the barrel of her gun and helped

"For God's sake, look out where you're pointting that gun!" Ed said. "You gone crazy?"

him to drag himself to the platform where he lay with his eyes closed, coughing up water and trying to breathe. At last, he opened his eyes and sat up.

"We've got to get out of here," he said. "This thing's going to fall apart any minute."

She helped him pull the boat up until it was about even with the platform, riding up and down with the waves. Bill slid over to the up-wind side and held the boat as best he could.

"Jump with the next wave," he yelled. "Then sit on the bottom and bail with your hat."

Mildred jumped, somehow remembering to take her gun with her, and Bill tumbled in after her. The trip to shore wasn't so bad because they could drift with the quartering wind. All Bill had to do was to keep the prow into the waves while Mildred bailed. Between the two of them, they managed to keep her afloat. Ed ran down the shore and waded out to pull them in through the last twenty yards. As she climbed out on the shore, Mildred looked out across the bay. The blind was gone.

Ed was voluble in his apology. "Gee, Mildred, I'm sorry to get you into such a mess. I was coming out to get you but Bill here beat me to it."

She didn't answer. She just looked at him for a moment. Then she walked over to Bill, who was sitting on the ground being actively ill. He smiled when she came toward him and struggled to his feet.

"I'm all right," he said. "Just drank a little too much salt water, that's all. I guess we'd better get back to town. You're pretty wet."

She went up the shore and brought his jacket to him and helped him into it. Then the three walked slowly and silently back to town.

When they reached the corner near her house, Ed spoke up.

"Well, I'll leave you folks here."

"Just a minute, Ed," Bill said. Then to Mildred, "Have you got a couple of shells in your coat? Thanks. Now, let's see that gun of yours."

(Continued on page 161)

KILLER SHIP

By BRIAN O'BRIEN

THE *Condor,* 160-ton whale-killer, sheered off from her parent ship, *Cormorant,* sixty miles out of Valparaiso.

"Luck, son," roared Captain Gorrissen from the stern bridge above the great port through which whales were hauled bodily to the flensing deck.

Jens, captain and gunner of the *Condor,* six feet two, wide set, tow headed, the spit 'n' image of his father, lifted a long, powerful arm in acknowledgment.

Above the eastern horizon the coast of Chile was a purple saw-edge against a cloudless sky.

"Well, here we go," Jens said to Willi Hansen, as their little craft shoved her high bow through smooth blue rollers. "Lucky to get to sea. I was afraid they'd hold us in Valpo for the duration."

"They got sense, those Chilenos," returned the chunky, black-haired mate.

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT

Jens swung the gun until it covered the stern, then he pulled the trigger.

"They know we can kill enough whales to pay our charges."

"As long as a damned U-boat doesn't slip another tin fish into her." Jens glanced uneasily at the slab-sided *Cormorant* already far astern. "This is no time to hunt whales. I should have been in the Navy a year ago. But—"

But a year ago *Cormorant* was hunting whales on the Off Shore grounds, that area through which the great beasts passage up the west coast of South America. Her bulk tanks were nearly full and she had a 100-foot sulphur bottom on her flensing deck. When a U-boat, lying like a basking shark at periscope depth, fired a torpedo into her just as she was squaring off to enter the Valparaiso Channel.

She just managed to beach herself

inside the harbor, bellowing like a sperm whale, with three tanks pierced, two digestors ruined and a cracked shaft.

By the time she was refitted her crew was gone and charges had piled up until some of the Chilenos hoped they'd get the *Cormorant*. Captain Gorrissen paid out all he owned to clear her, but they attached her just the same. Until Chile decided to come in on the right side. Then they agreed to let the old man take out his factory ship and killer, and kill enough whales to pay off his refit bills. But while they were waiting Jens' mother had died.

"*Cormorant* was her home," his father said. "My home too, and yours. The Chilenos mended her and gave her back to us. So we've got to pay our debt. She'd want it that way. I know you want to get at those Nazis; so do I. But we've got our duty and when that's done we'll all go up to San Francisco and fight. The *Cormorant* will make a good tanker and you can take out *Condor* with a three-inch gun on her bow. Wait son, till we've paid off. You'll get your submarines."

Jens had served under his father since he was able to handle a line. And the habit of obedience was strong in him. He looked into the old man's frosty blue eyes and knew he was right.

"We'll pay our debts first, son. Then we have another, bigger debt to pay."

"Yes, sir."

And now blue whales were running and with luck they could be cleared and on their way north in three months.

THE *Condor* was 140 feet overall; built like a trawler with a high, sharp bow mounting the deadly harpoon cannon and a low, squat stern to give bite to her powerful screw. Mighty triple-expansion engines could shove her along at fifteen knots in most weather. And Geordie Knight, her Newcastle engineer, was the man to get the most out of them.

The crew were shaking down; two firemen under the keen eye of Geordie's assistant feeding her coal; the cook-steward making savory smells in the tiny galley below the bridge; and three deck hands checking line and tackle. In a white-painted barrel at masthead José Perine was already searching the smooth sea with a powerful glass.

Jens and Willi Hansen ran along the catwalk from the bridge to the gun platform on the foc'sle head. The stubby cannon was already loaded, its massive six-foot harpoon with four great barbs and a bomb point protruding from the muzzle, and lashed in place with a seizing of hemp.

Under the muzzle and made fast to the harpoon was a coil of manila that ran over a brass-bushed wheel in the bow, under a guide pulley below the gun platform and thence to a great accumulator block beneath the lookout at masthead. From there the stout yellow line ran to a powerful winch for'ard of the mast, over its barrels and down through an oaken channel to the line bin in the hold. There were two sets of line, blocks and pulleys; port and starboard.

By late afternoon the killer was alone on the ocean. Jens, balancing easily to the roll and pitch of his vessel, was checking the harpoon bomb which was timed to explode in the vitals of a whale. Geordie was in the wheelhouse checking the radio telephone to the *Cormorant*. Light spray flipped across the low deck.

"*Blaast! Blaast!*" Willi yelled from masthead.

"Where away? My God! What luck!"

Willi's arm pointed southeast.

Without orders the steersman headed in that direction. The crew, shouting excitedly, ran to the deck, leaning over the starboard rail and pointing. Jens thought he saw a feather of spray above the heaving sea.

"Full ahead!" he ordered.

"Five an' forty more," Willi called down to him, using the old whalers' prayer.

The killer knifed up a glittering bow wave as she leaned to a quartering sea. Jens hefted the pistol grip of the gun, swinging it to test the pivot. In half an hour they could all see the tall spout. The beast was spouting every five minutes and sounding regular as clockwork, traveling a set course at about six knots.

"There's his slick," called Willi. "Hold her to port of it."

The killer slid beside the great oily trail that whales leave on the surface when they sound, for it is an old superstition that if a boat crosses the slick the whale will hear and become galleyed.

Jens glanced behind him. A winchman stood at the controls, ready to give or take line like an angler, for that is what the killer would become once the fighting weight of a whale got on her line.

He was dead ahead, long, humped, blue-black, looming up through the water, spouting high then arching like a porpoise for his dive.

"*Blaah vahl. Stor en,*" muttered a hand.

Jens signaled for reduced speed as the great beast breached less than a hundred feet ahead. He was not yet alarmed, for there was no change in his speed. They heard the sough of his spout, the hump rose and silently he disappeared beneath the waves.

"Stop."

The *Condor* slid silently through the translucent water, swinging a little to port as the long shape rose almost alongside.

JENS swung the gun. The great pointed head of the monster lifted above water, a mighty, curved lip creamed the surface, the rubbery flank slid past the gunsight. The hump passed, then the dorsal fin.

Something must have galleyed the whale for he suddenly surged forward in a spurt of speed.

Jens squeezed the trigger. A terrific report shocked the silence and the whale was blotted out by a cloud of powder smoke flecked with bits of wadding. The thick line writhed through the murk like a tormented snake and the harpoon hit the whale with a squelching thud.

Great black flukes swung up, slapped the surface with the bang of a cannon and the whale sounded. Then there was a dull boom as the bomb exploded in him. The sea boiled and the *Condor* pitched in the wash.

Jens hung on, cursing, trying to peer through the flying spray. The line whined through the port bow wheel and he could smell the heat of it. The winchman heaved water over the smoking, creaking coils. The mast quivered like a bamboo rod and Willi heaved about the lookout tub like a demented monkey.

"Blast it!" he yelled. "You hit him in the small."

"Right," growled Jens. "He'll run for a week. How much line gone?"

The winchman glanced at his mark.

"A hundred and twenty-eight fathom."

"Brake a little."

The line squealed as the oak blocks pressed it and the killer moved through the sea.

"Half ahead."

The engines thumped again and the winch clattered, hauling in the slackening line.

"Full ahead. Haul away."

More line came in, the yellow diagonal from masthead to winch trembling and shaking diamond-bright drops.

Willi tumbled down from masthead and swiftly loaded another harpoon.

"Cut your engine," Jens ordered. "We're fast, I think."

The vessel pitched as the maddened beast towed her through the mounting seas.

"We'll have to drown him," Jens said. "He won't stop now."

Far ahead was a commotion. The whale heaved half his length out of the water in a mighty splash, spouted high and smashed along the surface like a battleship.

"Keep that line taut!" roared Jens. For if the line once got slack that whale could snap it, for all its three-inch diameter, like cotton thread.

Willi glanced at the bow wave.

"He must be doin' a good 'leven knots," he marveled.

"Yes, but he's lagging a bit. I think he's weakening."

Now a red stain appeared in the water; the whale spouted oftener and weaker.

"Full ahead," Jens ordered. "We'll try for another shot."

Again the winch clattered and more line came in. The whale changed course. Then he sounded.

"Starboard. Haul away," Jens yelled.

Great black flukes swung up and the whale sounded.

The whale breached again, spouted weakly and sounded. The killer ran close and they saw the great body not far below.

"Destroyin' his trim," Geordie explained to his pop-eyed assistant. "They'll droon the booger."

"'Ow come?"

"He's like a floatin' ship. When ye haul up the starn the bow gaes doon."

THREE times the whale tried to breach, but the drag of the killer and the tug of the line held him under.

It was nearly an hour before he stopped running.

"Let slack," Jens ordered and stood by the gun. "I'll get him when he breaches."

But the line ran down almost vertically from the bow-wheel.

"He's dead."

The little vessel rocked, her bows held down by the weight of the whale.

"Astern a bit," Jens ordered. "He may be sulking."

He hung overside feeling the taut line.

"Dead as mutton," he decided. "Haul away."

The winch pawls clattered and slowly the wet line came in over the bow wheel. The mast creaked and drops rained down from the strained line. Two hands ran below to stow the line in its bin. There was two miles of manila down there and it had to be coiled just right or it would kink under the drive of a running whale and jerk the deck out of the *Condor.*

It was dark before the whale was at the surface. Cargo lights lit up the streaming bulk, almost as long as the killer. A boat went overside and the beast was made fast, head and tail, to the *Condor.* Willi drove a lance deep into the monster and pumped air into him until he resembled a balloon.

"Waif him."

A hand drove a pointed pole with a flag marking the whale as the *Condor's* property.

The harpoon was buried about ten feet ahead of the tail flukes. Willi cut off the line close to the blubber and cut a notch in the tail to show the factory ship that one harpoon must be cut out before flensing.

"Cast off."

The *Condor* swung away from the floating mass about which already they could hear the snap of sharks.

"Spell oh!" Willi called, and the crew stood by the winch for a tot of rum.

"Good work," Jens told them. "That whale will run eighty barrels."

"Five an' forty more," chortled Willi, lifting his tot of rum. " 'Nother month like this and we'll be clear of them shipfitters."

Jens went to the radiophone in the wheelhouse and signalled the *Cormorant,* sixty odd miles north.

"One blue," he reported. "Eighty barrels if he's a pound. We'll cruise to the eastward and come up the coast. See you in three weeks."

"Good lad," his father said. "I'll run down on that whale. Good hunting. Radio your position every day."

The sea had got up a bit and cool spray flirted across the foredeck. Jens and Willi wedged themselves in the narrow saloon below the bridge, holding on to the swinging table while they ate. The *Condor* was rolling heavily, but from the foc'sle below the gun platform came the lusty singing to the hoarse wail of an accordion.

They turned out to make room for Geordie and his assistant and Jens sat in the wheelhouse to smoke. The little craft was drifting; no need for a lookout. An ash hoist clanked loudly above the rumble of voices. Willi went to his bunk.

Suddenly the radio crackled.

S. O. S. O. S. O. S. O. S. . . Cormorant attacked Submarine . . . Sinking . . . Two boats away . . . Position Lat. 30.41 S. . . Long. 72.10 W. . . S. O. S. O. S. O. S. O. S. . . . Lat. 30.41 S . . . Long. 72.10 W. . . . Sub—

Jens gasped, grabbed for the radiophone, jiggling the key.

"Father!" he called desperately. "Father! Hold on!"

There was a sharp click and "Silence!" roared a terrible voice, and a horrible, mechanical screech told of the radiophone ripped out.

Willi stood behind him, bony features grave.

"He don't want us to talk for fear of giving our position away."

"I know." Jens' face was bleak, his jaw muscles crawling like reptiles under the bronzed skin.

He shoved past Willi as if he couldn't see him and leaned over the bridge rail.

"All hands!" he roared. "Put reliefs in the stokehold. Full speed!" He wheeled back to the wheelhouse and ripped a chart from the locker.

"He's only sixty miles away," he told

the steersman. "Steer northeast by north."

"Aye, aye."

CHAPTER II

CORMORANT'S END

IN THE darkness the *Condor* crashed over following seas, her gun buried in spray, her afterdeck inches deep.

"Lights out."

"I'll get up to masthead," Willi said awkwardly, and climbed the shrouds, cursing.

Jens kept the bridge, his aching eyes straining through the lashing spray, his hands white knots on the rail. On deck the crew muttered to each other, ducking seas and staring ahead. Below Geordie yelled profane orders to the sweating stokers.

Spray banged against the wheelhouse and the steersman clung to the kicking wheel as the *Condor* twisted and rolled like a madman shouldering through a stubborn mob.

"What's that?" yelled Willi, after an hour. "I can see fire in the sky."

Soon Jens could see it. He swallowed jerkily.

"Come on!" he yelled savagely down the voice pipe. "Give me more speed."

"It's all right, son," came Geordie's voice, surprisingly gentle. "She's doing all she can—and more."

Frantically he ran outside, slamming his hands on the rail. He looked down at the men on deck. What the hell were they staring at?

"Get below!" he screamed at them.

And silently they went.

The glare was easy to see now and the steersman made for it. Willi climbed stiffly from the masthead.

"Better get some rest, son," he said. "I'll stand this watch."

"Get below," snapped Jens, throwing his arm off.

Dawn was breaking and the red seemed to fade. Great gray seas piled before the killer ship and Jens stood, numb with cold, staring hopelessly ahead. Then the wind dropped and the sea moderated a little.

"Drink this, son." Willi held a mug of coffee.

"Thanks." And Jens scarcely knew it was scalding.

"Ought to be gettin' close soon. I guess I'll go aloft."

"Two boats," he reported half an hour later. " 'Bout five miles ahead. I—I can't see the *Cormorant.* Maybe he's aboard one o' the boats."

"Not he, if the *Cormorant's* gone," Jens whispered through salt-caked lips.

"Don't talk like that, lad," said Geordie, standing beside him.

There was plenty of evidence of the *Cormorant's* end. Oil slicks showed where tanks had burst. Tubs, scraps of dunnage, a stove boat and deck gear littered the sea. And over all was the stink of burning.

Two boats rowed slowly toward the *Condor.* They were jammed with shouting men, laden until there were few inches of freeboard. The *Condor* ran down to them. There were sixty-three, all that remained of a crew of 120.

Captain Gorrissen was not among them.

"He wouldn't leave the bridge," a bosun reported. "Ordered us away, he did. Said he'd wait for you. We stood by long as we could but she caught fire and sank three hours ago."

Jens stared down at them. Some were moaning from scalds, others retched miserably from oil poisoning. Many were weeping with sorrow and fear. Some cursed bitterly. Jens breathed deeply, trying to hide the pain in his heart.

The deck was unbelievably jammed. Men perched on the winch and gun platform like sick crows, answering eager questions from the *Condor* crew. Several had lost brothers. One elderly engineer growled oaths for the son who had been killed. The third mate stood like a rock while Geordie set and splintered his broken arm. Willi swabbed burns and barnacle cuts.

JENS glared hopelessly about the littered sea. To the east the coastline was etched black against the risen sun.

"Get some of them below," he ordered, "and give them coffee."

But some of the rescued were yelling from the rolling deck, "Take us ashore! You want that sub to get us again? Run us ashore."

Some Chilenos were babbling with fear. Some raved, shaking burned fists across the water.

Jens gave orders to run for Valparaiso. He watched the men ganging up for coffee. There was no shelter and none wanted to go below. Willi watched them like a hawk, for any sudden move on that overcrowded deck would capsize them.

He moved alongside Jens.

"I'm sorry, son," he whispered. "Say, listen. I'll come up to the States with you and 'list."

Jens turned like a mechanical thing and looked at him.

"Not yet," he said woodenly. "We still have a debt to pay."

"What?"

"I'm going to hunt that submarine. I'll kill her like a whale. I—"

"There, now, Jens. Rest a bit. You ain't had no sleep. Come below now, an' turn in."

Jens turned eyes that were hard as stone on him.

"You think I'm raving?"

"All right, son. We'll hunt her together. Now, go below, will ye, and sleep."

The gray-faced young man stumbled down the narrow companion to the cabin he shared with Willi. He sat on his narrow bunk for a moment. Then he turned and fell on his face.

All that day he lay while the *Condor,* towing the two lifeboats, rolled her stricken cargo over a cross sea toward the land. The survivors crouched miserably in whatever shelter they could find, for the cold, biting spray lashed them continuously.

It was past noon when he awakened. Wearily he swung long legs out of his bunk and sat there staring at the horizon that ascended and descended past the upper and lower rims of the port. Then he heard the babble of voices and shivered with sick realization.

A debt! There was a debt to pay. That was the last thing his father had said. But the submarine had killed his father.

Jens

Had destroyed the *Cormorant;* had killed the men who were helping to square the debt.

His father had paid something. Maybe if he handed over the *Condor* the Chilenos would be satisfied.

Something boiled within him. It was not his debt. It was not his father's debt. It was that submarine's debt.

He stood up. The way was clear in his shocked mind.

The submarine must pay!

He stepped outside. The land was near; he could make out the mole that sheltered the channel into Valparaiso.

"Stop the engines," he called.

Pallid, pinched faces turned up to him as the thump of the screw ceased. Willi climbed to the bridge.

"How d'ye feel, son?"

"I'm all right. I've been thinking."

"Now listen—" But something in Jens' eyes silenced him.

"I'm going to hunt that submarine."

"What's yer plan, son?"

"I can't take the Condor into Valpo, or they'll take her to make up what they lost in the *Cormorant*."

"What will you do, then?"

Jens turned to the men below him.

"I'm not going in," he told them. "The mole is but three miles off. Those who want to can take the two lifeboats and make for shore. I'm going back and get the submarine that sank the *Cormorant*."

HE WAITED until the astonished comments had stopped.

"I've got coal and food for nearly three weeks. But I need a crew; ten men."

There was excited chatter among the seamen. Some argued, others stared wildly about them. Three began hauling in the lifeboats.

"I'll go," said the engineer. "They killed my kid. I'd like one crack at 'em. One crack. By—"

"I'm signin' on, too," called another. "I got a brother that needs settlin' accounts for."

"Nuts. He's crazy," growled one man. "I ain't lookin' fer more trouble."

"You've all had advances," Jens told them. "You're free to go or stay."

"You don't owe us nothin', son," said the bosun. "But I'm takin' no more chances."

"I'll go with ye, of course," Willi said. "Though I think it's crazy."

"Ye'll need someone for the engines." Geordie spat overside.

José Perine shoved to the bridge ladder.

"I keel them!" he raved, black eyes flashing. "I drive those sharks to bottom."

In two hours the volunteers were chosen and the two lifeboats crawled like beetles over green water toward the mole.

"'Bout ship," Jens ordered. "If we don't get under way they'll send out the *guarda costa* and hold us."

The *Condor* swung about and headed west.

"I go masthead," shouted José. "I got better eyes as anyone. I sight that damn sub pronto!" The muscular Chileno ran up the shrouds like a monkey.

Geordie and the old engineer were confabbing amicably in the engine room.

"What's the plan?" Willi wanted to know.

"We'll drift on and off where the *Cormorant* went down," Jens said. "That'll save fuel. That sub must come up somewhere and then we'll get her."

"What if she don't?"

"We'll wait till she does. If we run out of fuel we'll kill a whale and burn blubber. Eat it too, if necessary."

His face was hard as stone.

"From now on we run this craft like a warship," he said. "Lights out after dark and rifle drill for the deck hands. We have six Winchesters. Break 'em out and issue them with ammunition."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Willi.

When night fell, Jens ordered the engines stopped and the little killer rocked like a toy ship in the ground swell. Willi, Geordie and the old engineer crowded into the little saloon. José, down from masthead, jammed his bulk between the bulkhead and settee.

"Now"— Jens' young face was bleak in flickering lamplight—"who knows anything about submarines?"

"I served in a shipyard up in Glasgow, once," Geordie offered. "They—"

"Wait a minute." Willi shoved through the door to the cabin. "I got a magazine somewheres. There's a picture in it of a U-boat. Newest kind too." He rummaged about under his bunk and came out triumphantly bearing a tattered picture weekly.

"Got this in the Seaman's Home," he confessed, leafing through the pages. "Here 't is. Colored, too."

THEY spread the double page on the bulkhead.

"Speed 16 to 20 knots on the surface," Willi read.

"Yeah but she'll only do 9 below," Geordie pointed out. "An' only that for a couple hours, on account of her batteries. She can't run on her Diesels submerged."

"What about armor?" Jens asked.

"Anywhere we could drive a harpoon in her?"

"Man, ye're crazy." Geordie scoffed. "But wait a bit." His blackened finger touched the stern of the U-boat pictured. "There's two rudders there an' two screws, beside the stern plane. If ye got a good shot there ye might tie up her rudders or foul her screws."

"What if she sees us first?"

"We've got to chance that," Jens said. "We've got fifteen knots and make a darn small target for a gun."

"Torpedoes got to be deeper than ten foot to be accurate," Geordie pointed out.

"What you talk?" José shouted. "I am lookout. I sight torpedo wake, I sing out. We got plenty time to dodge heem."

"Listen," Jens told them. "This is what we do. We get close as possible. If she fires on us we make straight for her. If she is submerged we follow her 'til she comes up. Then—well we got six Winchesters. We can stop them from getting to their deck guns."

"Sure, we stop them." José grinned from ear to ear. "We take heem like blue whale."

"This is no game, José. That sub may be bigger than the *Condor*. She's got thirty men aboard, maybe, with guns and machine guns and rifles. Torpedoes too. This ain't no picnic."

"*Si, señor*. Bot we take heem alla same."

"Willi, you find out who are the best shots, and let them have the rifles. Try them out on floating cans, wood, anything; there's plenty of ammunition. We'll have to be ready for the sub if we sight her."

"Must be a big one, so far from base," Geordie said, reading the article illustrated by the picture of the U-boat. "Says here that they got listening devices to tell where we are."

"So much the better," Jens said. "They'll hear us and come look-see. Now we'll turn in. Set a lookout in the bows; relief every two hours. We'll talk some more in the morning."

They clattered off and Jens heard Willi haranguing the deck force. He sat studying the U-boat picture. She looked mighty tough. But she *must* be vulnerable. If they could force her to the surface half the job would be done. It all seemed easy, too easy. He wondered if she had a base somewhere near. The Juan Fernandez Islands were not far off and there were plenty of remote bays along the mountainous coast. He fell asleep to dream of submarines breaching, spouting and diving, with himself fast to one, towed in a tiny whaleboat. There was something. . . . Something. He awoke, blinking in strong sunshine.

The *Condor* rocked in oily sea. Willi was on the winch deck showing two grinning hands how to handle rifles.

SLUICING sea water over his muscular shoulders, Jens scanned the smooth sea. Then he called Geordie.

"Get steam up. We'll make for the ship lane between Valpo and Juan Fernandez. She might have a quiet little hideout there. Listen, Geordie, can you make a bomb strong enough to hole that sub?"

"Mebbe. But how ye goin' to get close enough? That charge only carries a harpoon eighty foot wi' accuracy."

"We'll use a double charge."

"Want to blow the gun up, son?"

"We've got a spare." Jens rubbed nervous hands. "Can you make a bigger bomb?"

"Aye, I guess so. It'll no' go in the gun barr'l. I'll fit it to the harpoon head an' harden the point. But s'pose the bomb blaes the harpoon oot?"

"It can't if the point goes through the skin. The bomb can only blow the barbs open. Then they'll hold. Anyhow we have a chance to foul the propellers, the rudder or the diving planes."

"Man, I wouldn't like to have ye after me," said Geordie.

Jens went forward past three men who were industriously blazing away at floating objects. Stooping, he wrenched at the holding bolts of the gun mount. Looked strong enough, he thought. Willi came to him and they contrived to join two powder cartridges to fit the muzzle loader.

"Boy, I wouldn't like to be behind that when it goes off," Willi muttered.

Geordie and the old engineer were

hammering profanely over a vise on the afterdeck. And it was noon when, in a stink of solder and resin, they came forward with a long pointed bomb that fitted the harpoon threads.

"This is a hard point," Geordie explained. "The charge is a bit bigger. But wi' the extra blast behind it, it'll drive the point in and the bomb will blae open the barbs."

They lifted the loaded harpoon and slid it down the gun muzzle. Willi lashed it strongly in place to guard against its sliding out when the killer pitched.

"Noo," Geordie said. "Take a higher sight when ye fire, for this one is end heavy."

"Ye better be ready to duck when ye fire," Willi warned. "It may blow the whole gun in yer face."

"Well, there's no knowing 'till we try it."

"Good," Jens said. "Masthead!"

"*Si, señor,*" came Jose's voice.

"Keep your eyes open; we're going hunting."

"H'okay."

Jens breathed deeply through his nose. His eyes bore a fire they had not had for two days. The crew, watching, seemed almost as excited as their captain.

"Here's what we do," he told them, assembled on the winch deck. "We're all taking the same chance, so it's fair to tell you all the plan. If you don't like it, say so."

"Let's have it."

"If the sub sees us first she won't waste a torpedo on so small a craft; she'll surface to use her gun. We've got to run in close. We can zig-zag to confuse her aim and when we get near enough you can fire at her gun crew. Then, if she don't get us first we'll ram her or slip an iron in her bilge."

There was a short, savage cheer.

"Now we stand by the galley for a tot of rum."

That brought another cheer.

All that day the *Condor* rolled southeast by east. The weather held good and they sighted nothing.

Willi reported five good shots among the crew.

"Geordie wants a rifle," he reported. "He can use one too. Used to be a soldier, he told me. That old grease monkey's been everything."

"Good. Now, does everyone know their stations?"

"Sure. If we get in close, José, the two deck hands and Geordie take cover behind the bulwark and fire at anything they see. The old man stops in engine-room with the stokers. Cookie's got a damn great pistol. I'm standing by you. I want to see that gun when she goes off."

"If I'm right about there being a base on Juan Fernandez we ought to hear from her soon; we're getting close to the lane."

CHAPTER III

ENEMY SIGHTED

IT WAS getting dark and a cold wind swept from the south. José came down from masthead.

"What chance we got?" he demanded, putting his curly head inside the saloon.

"Good chance," Jens told him. "We might sight him tomorrow."

"*Bueno.* I spot heem."

"Might be a week," grumbled Willi. "This is a mighty big ocean."

"We'll wait." said Jens quietly.

He turned in that night to dream again of hunting great submarines in a whale boat. He was being towed by them. He awakened before morning cursing frantically. There was an idea in that dream, he felt sure. Something was trying to tell him how to hunt the submarine. He rolled over on his side willing himself to sleep and dream again. But he awakened with no light on the problem.

At dawn a lookout was posted and a quick observation put them half way between Valparaiso and the islands. The crew moved about the vessel alertly. Two of them helping Geordie and the old engineer, who called himself Pop, to make bombs for the spare harpoons. José ranged the bridge like an angry cat, watching the horizon closely and yelling at the lookout.

It was about ten. The *Condor* was idling along in a bumpy sea. Brilliant sun threw spray rainbows about her. Cookie was just shouting from the galley door.

"Blo-o-ws! Blo-o-ws!" yelled the lookout.

"Where away?" Jens jumped for the gun platform.

Over to the north was a feather of spray.

"Here it is!" growled Geordie, running to crouch under the starboard bulwark with his rifle. Beside him four others waited, eyes on the bridge.

"Full ahead!" yelled Jens.

The *Condor* heeled as she turned towards the spray.

"What d'ye make out?" Willi shouted.

"Can't tell. Might be a sub."

"After her!"

Jens spread his legs, swaying to the pitch and roll as he gripped the gun butt, swung her, glanced over the tackle and waited.

"Breaches!" yelled the lookout. "Blo-ows and breaches. It's a blue."

"Hell!" grunted Willi.

"Stop engines," Jens ordered, and sat on the platform.

The crew looked up from the deck, eyes glittering, faces tense.

"Why'nt we kill him?" one demanded. "Whales is worth money."

"Can't afford the time nor powder."

"Blo-o-ow!" screamed the lookout. "Over there to the west."

He ducked into the lookout as something screamed over head and hit the water beyond them with a brassy report. A column of water shot up a hundred yards away.

"Full ahead!" Jens roared. "Hard over! Head for her!"

The *Condor* wallowed in deep troughs as she spun. Another shell screeched past. The engines throbbed and the blue water boiled under her stern. She slid like a skipped plate on the flank of a big comber, smashed her bow into a a cross sea, lifted like a rearing horse, shaking all over, and started moving forward.

Another shell whined overhead to explode some distance off.

"They'll never hit us!" Willi bellowed. "Give her all you got."

"Stand by with the rifles!" Jens barked.

"Aye, aye."

Willi ran for the bridge, shouldering the steersman out of the way.

"Where away?" he called to the lookout.

"As you go. 'Bout three mile off."

Willi stood to the wheel, zig-zagging like a veteran. Several shells whooped over but none was close.

"She's turning!" yelled the lookout. "Can't see her."

BUT another shell, this time much closer, told that the sub was still surfaced.

"There she is, turning ag'in."

"I see her," Willi called, shoving the wheel over. "She's tryin' to get a broadside shot."

"Keep head on!"

"Aye, aye."

There was a sharp, earsplitting screech and the *Condor* shuddered as something exploded a few yards from her beam. Fragments clattered against her hull, whining as they ricocheted into the sea.

"Hold her."

"Aye, aye. She's getting close."

Jens crouched low behind the gun. Something chattered and sparks of light shot past him.

"They got a machine gun."

"Keep your heads down."

There was a crash of glass and Willi ducked as the bridge lights shattered.

Then Jens could see the streaming hull of the sub, long, low and rounded, but for the conning tower, like the humped back of a whale.

"Look out!" yelled Willi. "She's going."

"Full ahead!" bellowed Jens. "Ram her!"

"Sounded!"

The *Condor* plunged forward. But where the sinister, black object had been there was nothing but a boil of foam.

"Anyone hurt?"

Willi peered through the broken bridge lights.

"I gotta few cuts, nothin' much," he reported.

They stopped and Jens made an inspection. There were a few bright scars on the hull and machine-gun bullets had splintered the bridge and holed the funnel.

"Get to masthead, José," he ordered. "That sub may try for us again."

"I spot him all right," gritted the Chileno.

It was early afternoon and the killer rolled in a heavy sea. José swooped in dizzy circles from masthead but he kept his eyes glued to glasses with which he swept the surface.

"Slow down," Jens ordered Geordie. "Just keep steerage way on her."

But a heavy wind slashed them and the little craft streamed water until the crew took cover below.

"They can't sight us in this," gasped Willi, wiping his neck, "'less they runs into us."

"Wish I knew where she is."

"Yeah, if we had one of them listenin' gadgets like that sub got—"

"Say, Geordie," Jens called.

The little man, oil to the ears, climbed stiffly from the engine room.

"What are those listening things like?"

Geordie squinted at him, spat overside and scratched an unshaven chin.

"Hydrophones? They're shaped like horns wi' a microphone in 'em. Ye p'int the horn towards the sound and the louder it gets the nearer ye are to it."

"Can you make one with our microphone?"

"Aye, I guess so. But—"

"We won't need radio till we've got that sub."

GEORDIE opened his mouth and gazed upward. Then he grunted and without a word clattered down to the engine-room. He returned in a few minutes with a round-bottomed fire bucket.

"I could cut a hole in the bottom o' this an' fit the mike to it. Have to waterproof the mike, though. Sound carries better under water."

Jens followed him to the wheelhouse and marveled at those gnarled and oily fingers as they deftly unshipped the microphone from the radio telephone.

"Noo, I'll just tak' this below."

How he worked in that madly plunging ship Jens never knew, but at dusk he climbed, sweating, to the wheelhouse with the bucket coated with paraffin and the microphone fastened in the center of the bottom. From its wires came a stout, rubber-covered line about thirty feet long with terminals to attach to the radio set.

"Can't hear nothin' in this smother," he grumbled. "Ye'll have to wait for the sea to go down. One thing, that sub canna hear us, neither."

"How far can we hear with it?"

"Hard to say. Mebbe a quarter mile. Depends on the sea. Have to stop engines. Might not work at all." Geordie rubbed his nose. "Ah'm no wireless expert."

"You're a bloody miracle man," Jens told him, and saw his big ears go scarlet as he ducked below.

When darkness fell and the little *Condor* wallowed in mounting seas Jens went to the foc'sle to see if the crew were alarmed by their narrow escape from the sub.

They lay in their bunks chatting calmly through a choking haze of tobacco smoke.

"That bastard'll never touch the *Condor,*" they grinned in answer to his questions. "We'll get him tomorrow."

He climbed to his bunk much comforted.

But for two days the *Condor* pitched and rolled in heavy weather. The third night was calmer. The wind dropped and by midnight a dense fog shrouded a dead calm.

Willi took the home-made listening apparatus and, hanging over the stern, held it under water. Jens in the wheelhouse turned knobs, listening intently.

"Pass the word that I can't hear a thing but the scrape of his hands," he said. "Turn her slowly in a half circle."

"If ye can hear his hands it wor-r-ks." Geordie spat with satisfaction.

"Put a boat over and try again."

For two hours Willi turned the bucket in all directions, but without result.

"Maybe she's lying below with her engines off."

"She can't do that. She'd have to keep her pumps going or lose trim. It's too deep in these parts for her to lie on the bottom."

"Maybe she's surfaced and listening for us."

"Maybe."

Unconsciously their voices dropped.

"Them listening things can pick almost anything up," Geordie whispered. "Pass the word for all hands to keep quiet."

"Yes."

THE *Condor* floated like a ghost in utter blackness. The crew moved barefoot about their duties and Willi, overside in the workboat, patiently moved the listener while Jens stood guard in the wheelhouse.

By morning the fog was just as thick.

"She won't move about much in this," Willi decided. "No use us movin' either. Only give ourselves away. We'll just wait 'ntil we hear something."

"Right."

It was nerve-wracking business. The idle crew chafed at the silence imposed on them. They crouched sulkily below smoking and grumbling in whispers. The cook was particularly jumpy. For every time a pot clattered, Geordie appeared, a black-faced demon, and cursed him horribly.

The fog held for a week and tempers were on their ragged edges.

"Fuel's gettin' low," Pop reported. "We gotta keep up a head o' steam whether we're movin' or not. We can't go on much longer without going back to port."

"Thought we come out here to fight," grumbled one of the crew. "Ain't doin' no good sittin' here like a duck, waitin' fer that sub to come along and sink us."

Jens was taut as a steel cable, his eyes hungry, long furrows in his cheeks.

"We stay till we get her," he said. "Get below."

Then, late that afternoon, Jens heard something.

Willi was close to the side holding the bucket under water. A faint thumping came to Jens' headphones. He peered overside.

"Softly," he hissed. "Turn her gently. Hold it."

Willi carefully lifted the bucket out of the water and pointed in the direction from which the sound came loudest.

"Slow ahead," Jens ordered, giving steering directions. "She can't hear us while her own engine's running."

"Go steady, son," Geordie cautioned. "She ain't far away. She might hear us without her sound detectors."

Willi had hooked on astern.

The engines stopped and the *Condor* slid forward some fifty feet. Willi put the bucket over again. But there was no sound.

"See? Wait for dark."

Fog closed around them like a blanket and the gun on the bow looked like a crouching beast. All hands leaned overside straining their ears. But it was as though they were alone in a strange cloud-world of silence.

Silently they ate and darkness filtered through the ghostly mist. Willi paddled the boat a few feet to port and tried the listener again. Jens made out a faint chugging noise.

"Take the phones," he said to Geordie. "What d'you make of it?"

The engineer listened, head cocked to one side like a ragged old blackbird.

"T'ain't screws," he decided. "She's surfaced, I reckon. Tell ye what." His eyes gleamed. "That's her battery charger. She's lyin' on the surface givin' her crew a blow."

"How far away?"

"Less'n a quarter mile."

Jens stared into the fog.

"What'll ye do, son?"

"They'll hear us if we try to get up to her."

"Right. We'll have to wait for mornin'. The fog may be gone by then. An' about time too."

"She'll see us first and blast us to bits in this calm sea. We've got to get in close *before* she knows it."

"What ye intend to do? Put a waif on her?"

Jens stared at him for such a long time that the Tynesider began to mumble apologetically.

"Wait a minute," Jens muttered. "I b e e n dreaming—dreaming. There's something . . . Wait." He ran to the deck, whispering to Willi to pull in to the side.

"That sub's out there somewhere, on the surface," he told him. "We can't get to her or she'll hear us and submerge. We've got to fix it somehow that we'll know where she is and be ready for her when she does come up. How'd ye do that?"

"You crazy, son?" said Willi.

"No. I've been dreaming. Geordie said, put a waif on her. What did we do with running whales? You know, when we harpooned them an' they ran us out of line?"

"Drogues?"

"That's it. I'm going to put a drogue on that sub."

"Son, you *are* crazy."

"Muffle those oars, Willi. I'll be up in a minute."

He went forward and into the hold. A faint light showed him the great line bins and beside them a spare harpoon gun and a stack of harpoons. But stowed amidships was that for which he was searching: a coil of light manila whale line, thirteen strand and less than an inch thick.

"Get that on deck," he ordered a hand. "Break it out and make fast a wooden bucket to it. Lively now."

"Aye, aye."

CHAPTER IV

Enemy Contacted

ON DECK Willi was wrapping canvas about the oar blades. He watched open-mouthed while the hand lowered the coil of line into the work boat. In half an hour the wooden bucket was made fast to one end of it.

"That line will hold three ton," Jens told him. "It ought to hold that bucket."

"How you gonna . . . Phew!" Willi whistled. "You gonna swim up to that sub?"

"Gonna try."

Jens took a careful bearing of the chugging sounds and stepped into the boat carrying a small compass.

"Now, Willi, row on this bearing," he ordered. "We'll find that U-boat somehow."

Silently Willi took his place, Jens sitting in the stern, and the little boat merged in the fog.

"What's the idea, son?"

"Listen. I know exactly what to do. I'll tell you when we get back."

"*If* we get back."

Silently the boat slid over the oily water. It was black as ink and there was no sound. After ten minutes they halted to listen.

"Got the right bearin'?"

"Yes. Keep her so."

Again they stole onward, stopping every few yards.

"They're listenin' too," Jens whispered. "So go steady."

There was silence, but for a faint swirling of Willi's muffled oars.

"We've missed her."

"Pull ahead a bit more."

They lay motionless, ears straining.

There was a sharp clink.

"Over there," Jens breathed.

Stealthily the little boat moved toward the sound.

"Ship those oars," Jens whispered. "I think we're close enough."

They waited but could hear nothing.

"They've charged their batteries," Willi murmured. "D'you s'pose they've submerged?"

"No. They are still on the surface. Listen, you might hear something; someone moving, or voices."

Standing up, Jens slipped out of his clothes.

"I'm going to swim over to her. Give me the end of that line."

Looping it about his shoulder, he lowered himself into the water.

"Pay out as I go," he whispered. "If I get in trouble I'll jerk the line twice. Then pull in hard as you can."

"Aye, aye."

Jens struck out in the direction of the last sound he had heard, using a long breast stroke. Soon the line dragged heavily on him. But he kept going. Twice he floated, listening, but could hear nothing.

The water was warm but the drag of the line pulled him under two or three times. He began to wonder if he had swum past the sub. He stopped again and promptly went under. The line would no longer let him float. His breath came with difficulty, and he opened his mouth.

Then a faint whiff of tobacco came to him. He swam slowly, ears straining. Again tobacco tainted the air. He must be close.

All of a sudden something tinkled close ahead and he heard a low murmur of voices.

A FEW strokes and he stopped, treading water—for a long shape loomed out of the fog. He heard clearly now the movement of feet and once thought he saw the glowing end of a cigarette. Floating there he tried to make out the shape of the sub. Cautiously, he swam closer.

There she was broadside to him. Someone was on the conning bridge; he saw him move. And men were lying on deck between the tower and the gun. Silently he swam toward the stern. He touched the fantail. There was no one near. Carefully he lowered his feet and felt them rest on the edge of a rudder. The rest helped him and he remained there for a minute drawing grateful breaths.

Close above his head was the rounded deck. He made out the rail. Carefully he pulled himself up to it. Under his hand was a ring bolt to which the clearing wire was fastened.

Slipping the line from his shoulder he made a couple of solid half hitches through the bolt.

Then he lowered himself into the water.

The crew of the sub were talking softly, apparently not alarmed.

Following the line he swam back to the work boat. Willi, craning anxiously over the gunwale, cursed with relief as he hauled him inboard.

"She's fast," Jens panted. "Row back to the *Condor*."

Silently the mate rowed while Jens paid out the line, carefully lowering the bucket into the water, where it floated, a pale blob in the fog.

"Now get me aboard. I'm freezing."

Following the compass bearing they reached the killer ship in half an hour.

"Get all hands into the hold." Jens shivered. "I'm getting a rub down and some dry clothes."

Nine men faced him in the only space aboard big enough to hold them all.

"Here's the plan," he told them. "That sub's out there, surfaced and waiting to hear from us. If we try to get close in this calm sea we'll make a perfect target; she'll hear us and blast us to bits. But when dawn comes she'll submerge and hang about for another go at us.

"I've got a drogue on her. There's fifty fathom of manila fast to her stern with an oak bucket on the end of it. Wherever she goes that drogue will kick up a wake like a speed boat and we can trail it."

"S'pose she goes too deep?"

"She won't. She can't see the drogue and she won't think it necessary to go below periscope depth. It's too deep for her to rest on the bottom so she'll have to keep going when under water. But she can only make nine knots so we'll have the legs of her.

"Now here's what we have to do.

We've got to be close when she surfaces. She's like a fort but she can't do a thing until her crew gets on deck to the gun. We've got to stop them; our rifles can do that if we're close enough. We've got to keep her deck clear until I can get close enough to fire a harpoon into her."

"S'pose she don't come up?"

"She's got to. Her batteries won't run her forever. And she's got to run them while she's submerged."

"What about torpedoes?"

"We've got to keep a sharp lookout for them. She might get desperate and try to get one into us, especially if we're fairly near. But we can turn on a dime if we have to. José will be lookout and he'll sing out at the first sign of a torpedo wake. We'll dodge all she's got.

"Now turn in and get some rest. I'll stand watch till it gets light. We'll have action in the morning."

He went to the wheelhouse, Willi close behind.

"I don't feel like sleep," said the mate. "I'll get that listener over an' we'll keep tabs on them Nazis for a bit."

It was near morning and a faint gray lightened the fog. Jens, dozing at the headphones, started at a sudden thumping sound.

"Willi?" he whispered overside. "Call all hands. Here she comes."

A steersman crept into the wheelhouse as the sound of screws came closer. Soon they could be heard without the phones.

The steersman gripped the wheel, face tense as he waited orders. Then they heard a heavy splashing and the sounds ceased.

"SHE'S submerged."

"Yes, but not for long," Jens told him. "She'll be watching for us soon as this fog lifts."

Something skipped and splashed ahead. Then he made out a brief gleam of spray.

"The drogue. Slow ahead. Follow that wake," he ordered.

"Aye, aye." The man spun the wheel as the engines began a steady throbbing.

Once they almost ran the drogue down, but quick maneuvering saved it.

"She's going sou'east," Willi reported.

"Yes, making for the islands, I guess. Well, she'll come up soon and we'll take a crack at her."

"Wind getting up," observed Willi. "This damn fog will lift now."

The sea ruffled and the mist drifted away until they could see the drogue yawing and skipping a hundred yards ahead. José ran up to the lookout and leaned forward, peering ahead of the drogue.

"Come up, *hijo de perro!*" he barked. "Hey! Blo-o-ws! Periscope."

"Full ahead!" roared Jens. "Keep to port o' that drogue."

The *Condor* surged forward as her powerful screw bit. The rifle men crouched under the for'ard rail as Jens ran along the catwalk to the harpoon gun.

They could all see the upright periscope ripping through the water.

Then it disappeared. And the drogue dragged under.

"Damn her, she's lying low."

But the bucket came up and moved off more slowly.

"Keep beside her." Jens ordered.

José was jerking about like a bear on a chain, screaming curses at the submarine.

"Blows!" he shouted again.

And again the periscope showed.

"Must be worryin' 'em," Geordie said. "I bet they don't know how we can folley 'em."

"Watch out!" bellowed José suddenly. "Hard a-port! Hard over!"

The *Condor* heeled as she turned and Jens actually saw the burnished side of a torpedo as it skipped through a wave too close to the starboard side.

"They're settin' 'em for the surface," Geordie told him. "We gotta keep our eyes open. They ain't very accurate close to the surface. But we're not far away."

"Good work, José," Jens called. "Keep it up."

"You betcha. I watch heem."

The periscope had disappeared again and the drogue floated, moving slowly ahead.

Then suddenly it started forward again.

"Watch it!"

The drogue yawed widely, the *Condor* keeping station.

"Port, port a bit," Jens muttered. "She's changing course."

The drogue was dancing along at a good lick now. But the *Condor* had little difficulty in keeping abreast of it.

"She's trying for an offing. If she can get far enough away she figures she'll come up and shell us."

"Fat chance."

The sea was getting up and the *Condor* plunged deep as she kept abreast of the dancing drogue.

"Pull ahead of it," Jens ordered. "The sub's about a hundred yards in front."

Geordie increased his speed, and so they ran for an hour.

"Blows! Periscope!" yelled José.

JENS was at the harpoon gun in nothing flat. He could see the periscope a little ahead.

"Stand by!" he yelled. "She's going to chance it."

For suddenly the bow of the sub jutted above water and descended on it with a crash. The conning tower broke through and Jens yelled for speed as the whole deck of the U-boat became visible.

"Fire at anyone who tries to get on deck!"

He swung the gun, squinting over the sights. But there was the wail of a siren inside the sub and she began to settle.

Her screws rattled as they broke water for a moment and the forepart of her had already disappeared. She veered sharply away from the killer ship.

Jens swung the gun until it covered the stern. Then he squeezed the trigger.

There was an almighty bang and the barrel jerked upward, knocking him off the platform. But the line screeched out over the wheel and the harpoon shot over the disappearing stern of the sub. There was a splash and a loud report.

"Damn her!" he raved, watching the line sink into the sea. "Winch her in."

"Blo-ows!" screamed José again. "She's coming up."

"Winch in!" Jens yelled again. "Willi, bend another harpoon on the port line."

"Aye, aye."

Willi was already securing the second harpoon to the gun muzzle.

"Keep station, damn you!" Jens roared. "She's getting away."

"Figures we ain't got time to fire another harpoon," Willi muttered, beside him. "Well, here's where she finds out. Take a finer sight this time, son."

The starboard winch reeled in the spent harpoon and Willi examined it.

"No damage," he reported. "We'll get her this time."

"Blows! Here she comes!" José yelled again."

Condor surged forward. But the sub remained below water, her periscope jutting two feet above the waves.

"She's lookin' us over," Willi said. "Get over the gun as if you was tryin' to fix it. Don't let 'em see there's a new harpoon ready for 'em."

The sub surfaced, the decks streaming with foam were levelled. Seas still broke over the gun on her for'ard deck.

"Stand by!" Jens called. "Look out for that gun!"

A door in the conning tower opened and a man started out. But four rifles barked and he dropped, slid over the deck and into the water between the vessels.

"Good eye!" yelled Willi. "Watch out!"

"Look out!" José bellowed from masthead.

A man peered over the conning tower dodger. He ducked back as bullets clanged against it.

"He got machine gun!"

Another man jumped out of the conning-tower door and started for the gun. But he was dropped by rifle fire before he was near it.

Then a pistol barked and something whined past Jens' head.

"Look out!" he shouted. "Watch the bridge!"

He stood, knees bent, swaying with the plunging vessel, clinging to the pistol grip of the gun, swinging it toward the sub's stern and waiting for a fair shot. He was not afraid. He was surprised that he had time to think of it, but he was conscious of a cool calm, of steady hands. He felt fine.

There was another yell as a man

scrambled along the sub's deck and slid overboard with a bullet in him. Then the *Condor's* cook jumped for the bridge, an enormous pistol in his fist. Twice he fired at the sub's bridge and at the second shot a man straightened up behind the dodger and a machine gun clattered to the deck.

"We've got 'em!" Willi yelled. "Keep her decks clear!"

But shots were clattering off the *Condor's* bulwarks as men fired from the far side of the sub's conning tower. The cook fired down into the conning bridge but the wild rolling of the vessels spoiled his aim.

"Take cover, Jens!" Willi yelled. "They'll get ye!"

The sub's siren wailed and the bows went down.

"Hold it!" Jens called, crouching behind his gun.

CHAPTER V

ENEMY CONQUERED

THE conning tower passed his sights. He depressed the weapon as the streaming deck tilted. A giant sea rolled the *Condor* toward the sub and Jens saw the diving-planes, a flash of propeller and the twin rudders. He fired.

There was a deafening explosion and he reeled back from the gun, head ringing, blinded with powder fumes. Someone grabbed him as he fell off the gun platform.

"Fast! Fast, oh!" screeched José. "We got heem!"

The line was rushing out and the stubby gun barrel stuck up at a crazy angle.

"Let her run." Jens jerked himself away from those holding him and crawled back on the platform. "How much line out?"

"Ninety-eight fathom."

"Brake her. Softly now."

The blocks screamed and the mast trembled until José clung to it like a frenzied ape.

"Stop engine."

But the *Condor* still rolled ahead.

"All holding?"

"Aye, aye."

"Let her run. Keep the line taut." Jens reeled. A horrible pain paralyzed his left arm.

"We got the bull be the tail, now, son." Geordie capered like a black-faced jumping jack. "What ye goin' to do?"

"Let her tow us. When she slows we'll haul in and keep her stern up. If she stops we'll haul in till her head goes down and she drowns." He spat, and fainted.

He came to in his cabin, his left arm splinted and strapped across his chest.

"It's broke," Willi said.

"The sub?"

"Sulkin' right below us in forty fathom. She was runnin' to starb'd. Her steerin's damaged."

Jens struggled to his feet, groaning with the pain of his arm.

"Take it easy, son."

But Jens shoved him aside.

"Line's taut as a fiddle string. She's fast."

"Oil still comin' up." Geordie shoved his greasy face through the doorway. "Bubbles too. She's holed."

"May be a stall," Jens grunted as he weaved to the bridge. The men cheered as he looked down at them.

"We got her."

He hitched along the catwalk to the gun platform to where Geordie's assistant was tightening the holding-down bolts of the gun mount. The line disappeared into the translucent water at a steep angle.

"Get the listener overside."

Willi held the bucket over the low rail.

"Pumpin'," Geordie reported. "She's outta trim with the pull o' the line. Pumpin' water into her balance tanks to keep on an even keel. She can't stay right side up 'less her engines are runnin' or 'less she keeps her balance adjusted with water."

"Stand by and tell me when she stops pumping."

"Stopped now," called Geordie a few minutes later.

"Haul away!" Jens snapped.

The winchman threw his lever, the barrels clanked, steam jetted and the bow settled as the wet line came in.

"Brake."

"Pumpin' ag'in," Geordie reported. "Pumpin' like hell. Ye've hauled her stern up; she's down be the head."

"Good. Stand by the listener, Willi. Geordie, when she stops, haul away. Savvy?"

"Aye, aye."

Jens sat down on the platform. His arm was throbbing like a massive toothache. He could feel the bandage tightening as it swelled.

He grabbed for a stay as the *Condor* jerked forward.

"She's runnin'."

The *Condor* veered to starboard, moving at slow speed.

"She's deep," Jens muttered. "Heave away, the winch."

THE mast creaked under the strain and José almost fell out of the lookout as he craned to look into the water. Some line came in as the killer ship was towed in a wide arc.

"Look out ye don't put her in a dive," Geordie warned. "She'll drag us under."

The *Condor* slowed.

"She's comin' up."

"Haul away!" Jens snapped. "Willi. Load another harpoon. No line; we'll make her a present o' this one."

"Aye, aye."

"Blows! Blows! Dead ahead!" raved José suddenly.

Two hundred feet off, the saw-edged bow broke surface.

"Full ahead!" Jens yelled, and the *Condor* jumped.

Willi lashed a harpoon in the gun.

"Haul in, blast you!" he yelled as the slack line disappeared under her forefoot.

The sub was clearly visible, slanted up under the surface. Jens jumped for the gun controls. But there was an awful metallic racket, water boiled about the bow of the sub, a siren wailed inside her and she disappeared.

"Brake that line!"

But there was a terrific jerk and a length of wet yellow rope lashed through the air, snapping one of the mast stays.

"Damn!" raved Jens. "She's parted."

The winchman clung to his controls, speechless.

"Shut off the engines. We'll never catch her now."

"Man, where's yer eyes?" Geordie yelled. "Over there!"

To starboard, the bucket, still fast to the sub, skipped in a wide curve.

"After her!"

The drogue dragged for a few yards then went under.

"She's gone deep," Willi said.

"Shut off the engine. Put the listener over!"

Jens stumbled to the wheelhouse, snatched the earphones from Geordie and clamped them over his ears. He could hear a clattering beat below. Wordlessly he passed the phones to Geordie.

"Sounds like her screw's slappin' against her divin' plane or rudder."

"Keep steerage way on her," Jens ordered. "Sing out if that drogue surfaces."

He staggered to his bunk, nursing his broken arm. He gulped warm water from a carafe and wearily wiped his sweating face.

"We'll get her," Willi comforted. "That sub's badly hit. She'll likely surface this night."

"Aye an' we better get her next breachin'," Geordie put in. "We got just enough coal to get us back to Valpo."

"Then we'll float or sail till we do get her!" Jens snapped. "Get out."

They left him and he lay on his narrow bunk sick with pain from his arm, but sicker because the submarine that had so nearly been his had escaped.

It was getting dark. The *Condor* was rolling in a heavy sea barely keeping steerage way.

Then, "Blows!" yelled José.

Jens jumped for the bridge, cursing roundly as his arm banged against a bulkhead.

"Where away?"

He just made out the bucket as it slid down the flank of a wave.

"After it!" shouted Jens. "Break out cargo lights! Willi! Get some harpoons on the platform."

He clawed his way to the gun as the *Condor* pitched heavily toward the drogue.

"Watch out!" Willi called, struggling with a stack of harpoons below the

platform. "If she breaches now there'll be a fight."

"Get the men out."

THEY lined the for'ard rail, rifles ready. The winchman swung a cluster of lights to the masthead.

"Hold on to 'em, José!"

The gigantic Chileno leaned over the lookout and heaved the light cluster to its edge.

The powerful lamps blazed and he fanned them across the water.

"Blo-o-ows! There she is!"

Something smashed out of the water and the bow of the sub glittered in the light, steeply canted.

"Starboard!" Jens yelled, grabbing the gun for support as the *Condor* heeled.

"Begod, she's standin' on her tail." Geordie marveled.

"Watch her!"

The *Condor* swung alongside less than fifty feet from that jutting prow.

"Slow."

He waited for the *Condor* to swing toward the sub. Then he squeezed the trigger.

The harpoon flashed in the light. There was a sharp report, a brassy clang, and the six foot length of barbed iron smashed on the sub's deck and glanced off into the darkness.

"Another!"

Willi shoved a cartridge into the muzzle and heaved another harpoon after it.

"Hold hard! What's that?" screamed José.

The conning tower broke surface leaking white vapor. Something fluttered between the tower and the gun.

But Jens fired again, and again the harpoon crashed into the sub's plating.

"Get me in closer!" he bellowed. "I'll drive the next iron right through her!"

He clung to the controls while Willi loaded.

José clung to the light, holding it on the sub as best he could from the wildly whipping masthead.

Something white fluttered from the slanted conning tower.

"They're surrendering."

"Hell with 'em!"

Jens sighted along the reloaded gun. Then he made out a white face peering anxiously from an escape hatch.

He slacked his grip and straightened.

"Keep that light on her," he called. "You men, stand by with the rifles."

The *Condor* maneuvered closer until the canted bow jutted up a few feet from him. He kept the gun trained on the bow just ahead of the blister. Seas smashed and spouted between the vessels.

"Look out!"

A man crawled out on the sub's deck. He clung to the rail yelling.

"*Kamerad,*" came faintly across the roaring sea.

"How many aboard?" Willi yelled. "*Wieviel?*"

"*Vier und zwanzig, Kamerad!*"

"Tell them to come on deck one by one."

"*Zu befehl.*" The man clung to the gunmount and shouted something down the escape hatch.

"Heave him a line."

A weighted line snaked out and dropped across the listing deck. The dripping figure swiftly made it fast to the gun. Then he turned and dragged himself hand over hand through the leaping waves to the *Condor.*

JENS glared down at a thin-shouldered, pallid man with haunted eyes and a fear-filled smile. He climbed aboard, searching the hard faces and shivering in thin, soaked dungarees.

"*Kamerad,*" he said softly, holding his hands up.

"Search him and take him below."

The man cringed as a hand grabbed him.

Other figures scrambled for balance on the sub deck. They shouted, reaching for the line.

"One at a time," Willi called, gesturing with a rifle.

"Tell them if the sub is scuttled I'll drown the lot!" barked Jens.

They clawed their way over to the *Condor,* jumping on deck, glaring fearfully about them. The last to arrive was an older man in the tight-buttoned tunic of an officer.

He stared with amazement at the harpoon gun.

"That?" he rasped. "You fight me with that?"

"Look out. She's going!" yelled José.

The conning tower was lower in the water.

"It is air escaping," said the Nazi officer. "She will float."

"Get back and make that hatch secure," Jens ordered him.

The officer hesitated for a moment, glaring at Jens. Then he shrugged, swarmed back to the sub and secured dogs that held the hatch cover. Then he returned.

"She is holed aft," he explained. "Your —shell—opened a ballast tank. The batteries are spoiled. But she will float."

"Well for you she will," Jens told him. "Get below."

"But I am *offiziere*."

"Get below."

The man shrugged and followed a hand into the line hold.

"Make all fast down there," Jens ordered.

"What ya goin' to do with 'em, son?" Willi wanted to know. "Some o' the boys want to talk about their brothers who went down with the *Cormorant*."

"Yes," said Jens. "But they're prisoners now."

He looked about him. The sub deck, still canted at a sharp angle, was gray in the light. But the sea seemed to be moderating.

"Pass a line to the sub," he ordered. "We'll tow her in."

"Man, ye're crazy," Geordie gasped. "It's a five hun'erd mile to Valpo. Ye'll never make it."

"We're not going to Valpo." He smiled, dropping his good arm across the engineer's bowed shoulders. "You made a good listener out of the radio. Now make a good radio out of the listener. We'll call for a tug and pay off the Chilenos with the sub. She ought to square us for the *Cormorant*."

"Yeh, but where are you a-going?"

"Oh," Jens grinned at him. "We'll hitch a ride to the States. I find I like sub-hunting."

THE MYTH OF CALAMITY JANE

By BRUCE NELSON

THEY called her Calamity Jane. From the Texas Panhandle to the bonanza strikes of Deadwood and Alder Gulch her name was on men's lips, and the tall tales of her deeds were legend while still she lived. Eastern writers who had never been beyond the Alleghenies seized eagerly on the stories of the Western lady fire-eater and wove tales of her daring exploits which made

A Fact Story

Saving Captain Egan from a band of savages was one of her more hazardous exploits

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE WERT

her name a household word. Modern authors and Hollywood scenario writers have perpetuated the legend until, today, Calamity Jane is a heroic figure in our Western folk-lore.

The true story of her life is a drab caricature of the glamorous career invented by herself and supplemented by numerous biographers. As Bill Nye once put it, "Hard luck and Martha Jane Canary always went hand in hand."

The principal facts of her career are not hard to trace, although there are certain discrepancies in the several accounts dealing with her earlier years. According to Calamity's own version, she was born Martha Jane Canary in Princeton, Missouri, in 1851. Other writers place the year of her birth at 1850, and assert that she was born in Ohio, from whence her family moved to Missouri while she was a small child.

Her mother was Charlotte Canary, a handsome young woman whom her husband had reputedly rescued from a brothel in the hope of reforming her. Charlotte, however, proved to be singularly unimpressed by the reformer's arguments, and the staider elements of the little Missouri village were horrified at the spectacle of the young Mrs. Canary smoking cigars, drinking whiskey, and cursing loudly and publicly all who disapproved of her conduct. Her husband, a rather ineffectual young farmer, was either unable to curb Charlotte's lusty appetites or became finally reconciled to his fate. At any rate, during the rush to the Montana gold fields in 1865, the Canary family joined the hopeful caravan, and a short time later the legend of Calamity Jane was born.

There are numerous conflicting accounts of the years immediately following the family's removal to Montana. Calamity's own story, from which many biographers have taken their material, states that her mother died in Montana in 1866, after which she and her father moved to Salt Lake City, where the luckless reformer soon followed his unreformed mate into eternity. Another version has it that Charlotte divorced her unsympathetic spouse and opened a bawdy house appropriately called "The Bird-Cage" in honor of the Canary name, where the fifteen-year-old Jane ably assisted her mother in entertaining.

Some biographers confirm the fact of the paternal Canary's death, and assert that Calamity and her mother established a laundry near the Blackfoot gold diggings, while yet other stories affirm that Charlotte remarried and moved to Salt Lake City with her family. But in any case, the legend of Calamity Jane had its inception soon after her appearance in Salt Lake City in 1867.

In her autobiography, *The Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane*, she has given her own version of the career which was to make her name a byword. There is little of truth in it, but since other biographers have accepted her story and in many cases even embellished it further, a brief review of its salient points may be of interest.

AFTER the death of her mother, she relates, she spent a brief time following the construction camps of the Northern Pacific Railway, which was then extending its steel tentacles across the continent. Next, according to her highly fictional account, she made the acquaintance of General Custer and became a scout for the United States Army at Fort Russel. She began to dress like a man during this period, and participated in several campaigns against the Indians in Arizona and elsewhere. "I was considered," she writes modestly, "the most daring and reckless rider and one of the best shots in the Western country." Among her more hazardous exploits is an account of how she saved Captain Egan from a band of hostile savages, and how the captain, in gratitude, christened her "Calamity Jane" in recognition of her talent for appearing in time to avert disaster.

When General Custer and his famous Seventh Cavalry were ordered to the Black Hills of South Dakota in the middle '70's, Calamity describes how she accompanied them. But for an illness brought about by incredible hardships suffered while carrying important dispatches, she might have been present at the Seventh's tragic defeat at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. It was short-

ly after this, according to Calamity, that she met Wild Bill Hickok and came with him to Deadwood, South Dakota, where Wild Bill was soon to die with his boots on his feet and an assassin's bullet between his ears. Jane, in the meantime, became a pony-express rider between Deadwood and Custer City, but badmen were wise enough to steer clear of her path, "for, being a well-known rider and a good shot," it was quite apparent to amateurs like the Dalton and James boys that any attempt to molest the lady rider was virtual suicide.

When Wild Bill was shot from behind by the gunman, Jack McCall, Calamity's righteous anger knew no bounds. Cornering the culprit in a Deadwood butcher-shop, Jane seized a cleaver and forced the cringing badman to throw up his hands. But McCall survived to expiate his crime legally, for Calamity discovered at this strategic moment that she had left her shootin'-irons home on the bed-post. "I would have killed him on the spot," she confides, had it not been for this baffling circumstance. Just why she might have experienced any difficulty in braining with a cleaver a man whose hands were in the air is not explained. Nor does Calamity make clear why McCall, who was even then being hunted by Hickok's friends, was wandering about unarmed.

To sum up Calamity's colorful account: She left Deadwood in 1877, later prevented a robbery of the Overland Mail, nursed a camp of six miners through a small-pox epidemic, and helped the Seventh Cavalry construct Fort Meade and the town of Sturgis. The next year she became a prospector and afterward a bull-whacker on the route between Fort Pierre and the Black Hills. Later she homesteaded, ran a roadside tavern, moved to Texas in 1885, remarried and remained there until 1889. She became a hotel-keeper in Boulder, Colorado, and finally returned to Deadwood in 1896.

Calamity's autobiography ends here, with the return to the haunts of her earlier days. Its basic facts have been accepted by many writers of more enthusiasm than discernment, and her adventures have been more or less faithfully portrayed in a half-dozen Hollywood movies. The facts are less romantic.

Calamity's accounts of her U. S. Army connections and her duties as a scout and dispatch carrier are completely without foundation in fact. It is true that she lived in many of the frontier towns mentioned in her story, but her services to the Army were in a quite different capacity from that described in her book. Her story of Captain Egan's naming her "Calamity Jane" is a case in point. Captain Egan's only recollection of her was that he had once ordered her off a military reservation under his command for reasons of "discipline." Contemporary records indicate that she was recognized for what she was even among the rough and generous natives of the mining camps. The flamboyant falsehoods which filled the Deadwood newspapers at the time of her residence there in 1877 prompted one angry miner to take up the unaccustomed pen and pour out his wrath in a public letter to the Deadwood Daily *Champion:*

> As far as her solid merit is concerned she is a fraud and a dead give-away. A hundred waiter girls and mop squeezers in this gulch are her superior in everything. She strikes out and lays around with a lot of bull-whackers or road-agents like an Indian squaw. But everybody in the Hills knows her, largely through newspaper accounts that have made her famous. Her form and features are not only indifferent but are repulsive. It makes me tired to see so much written about such a woman.

SURELY the fact that such things could be written and printed in Deadwood papers at the time of Calamity's residence there is sufficient proof of her real character. At any rate, there is no record of any libel suits in succeeding issues, nor is there any record of her slaying a certain reporter, as there might well have been had she been the "dead shot" she claimed to be. Wrote this mischievous newsman, in 1878:

> Calamity Jane was a passenger on the outgoing Bismarck coach last evening. Her destination is not known to this reporter but she probably went down to visit the boys in blue.

Citizens of Deadwood who knew her well describe her as a common harlot—and one of such a forbidding and coarse appearance as to frighten even the tipsiest miner. Wild Bill Hickok's friends assert that her claim to being Hickok's sweetheart is an infamous slander—a fact which Calamity herself admitted in her declining years. In short, virtually every adventure related by this sorry creature in her "autobiography" was nothing more than a figment of her imagination.

At the time of the small-pox epidemic in the gold fields, the court records of the district indicate that, far from performing the offices of a Good Samaritan, Calamity was actually before a justice of the peace for jack-rolling a drunken miner to the tune of thirty dollars.

Upon her return to Deadwood in 1896, Calamity, who by this time had become almost a Western institution, became a member of Al Swearengern's burlesque troupe at the Gem Theater, but her stay there was brief. Swearengern objected to her conduct, as well as to her habit of improvising lusty lines at random moments in the performance. Next, she signed a contract to exhibit herself in Kohl and Middleton's circuit of dime museums, where she gave a short lecture on her adventures, peddled photographs of herself, and hawked copies of her autobiography.

Clad in fringed buckskins and armed with two huge six-guns of which she was obviously in deadly fear, she caused so much amusement among the customers that the venture was canceled. After another brief fling in show business at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, she became embroiled in a drunken fight, and Buffalo Bill gave her train fare back to Billings, Montana.

In her final years, she traveled about from town to town in the West, selling pictures of herself dressed in "scout" garb and cadging drinks and lodging as best she could. She spent a short time in a Montana poorhouse after falling ill at Bozeman, and upon her recovery she drifted back to her old stamping-ground at Deadwood. Penniless, her health broken by years of dissipation, and of such fearsome and forbidding visage that she was unable to practice her chosen profession, she found herself unwelcome even in the tough dives of Deadwood. A handful of kindly citizens paid her expenses during the few months left to her of life. She died in a cheap boarding-house in Terraville in the Black Hills. At her funeral in Deadwood virtually the whole town turned out and followed her coffin to Boot Hill, where she was buried beside Wild Bill Hickok.

Her own story, the praises of numerous biographers, and the final accolade accorded her by Hollywood have probably made her place secure as the epitome of those daring and hardy women who followed the forward movement of the Frontier. Perhaps it is best so. Calamity suffered sufficiently in life to make it seem unkind to shatter the illusion at this late day. But there is little danger of that. In the history of the West, legend has made her what she most desired to be, but never was.

SHARPER THAN THE SWORD

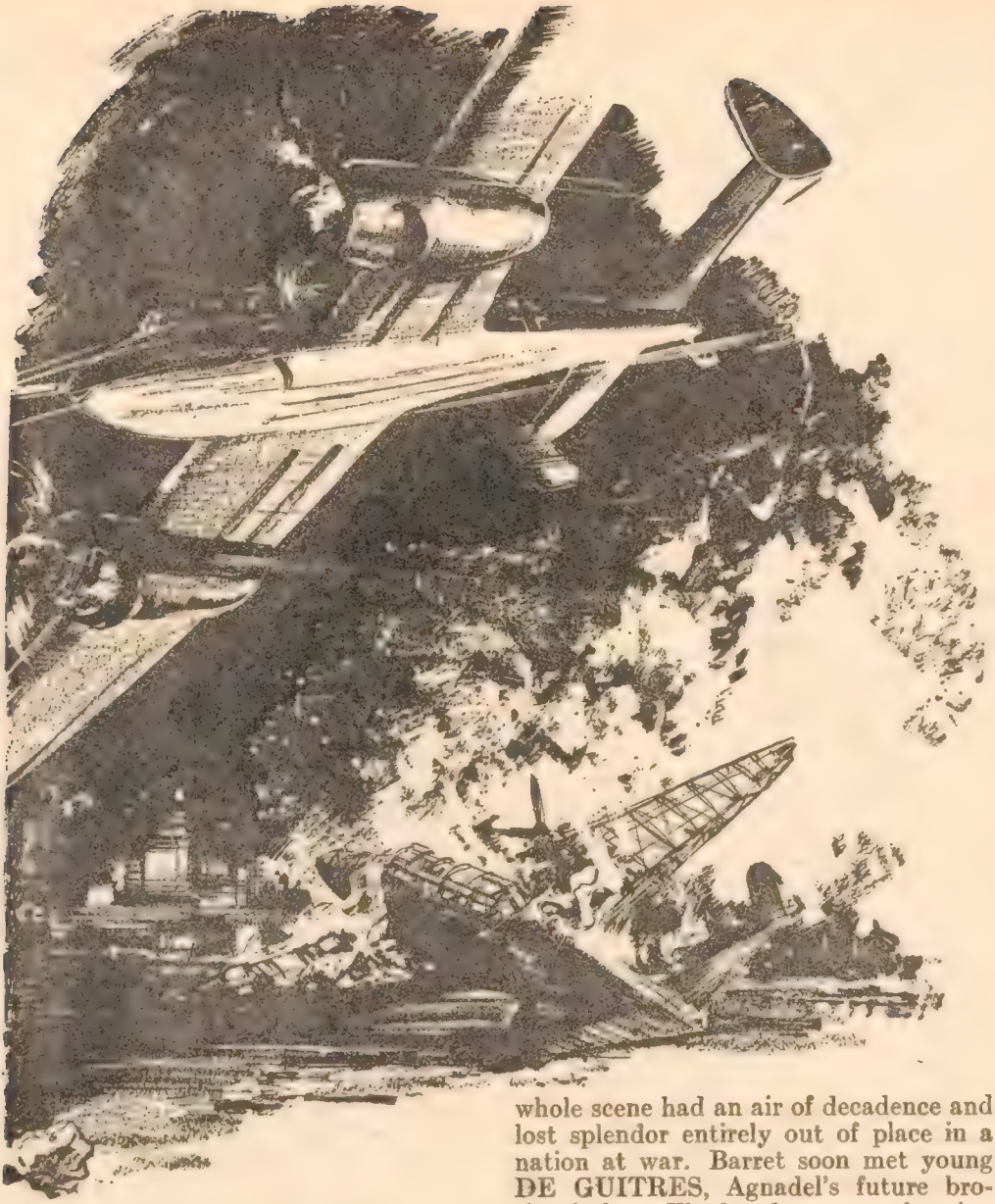
By

GEORGES SURDEZ

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

THE STORY THUS FAR:

LIEUTENANT BARRET was new to the French Air Squadron which, under the command of CAPTAIN AGNADEL, was patroling the skies that morning in 1940. The squadron soon picked up a formation of Messerschmitts and in the ensuing dogfight, the captain downed two with Barret's help. Later, when being complimented by the major,



The captain flew over the field twice more, swooping low over the wreck of the blazing Messerschmitt.

Agnadel offered Barret his own thanks, but with a stilted, though courteous, show of reserve. The man seemed almost a conceited fop, and yet in the air he was superb.

Agnadel took Barret home with him on their leaves. The imposing chateau was dominated by his mother, and the whole scene had an air of decadence and lost splendor entirely out of place in a nation at war. Barret soon met young DE GUITRES, Agnadel's future brother-in-law. The handsome naval ensign was both amused and disgusted by the actions of Agnadel and his mother in quelling a strike of local workmen at the Agnadel factories—accusing them of delusions of grandeur in regarding the factory hands as their serfs. After introducing Barret to OLYMPE, Agnadel's fiancée, they adjourned to an elaborate dinner. This was interrupted by the arrival of a committee of workmen who wished to see the captain about settling the strike. They were dismissed brusque-

ly by the Agnadels without being given time to state their case.

Shortly after Barret returned to his squadron in Lorraine, a German air attack caught the field flatfooted. Agnadel, Barret and a LIEUTENANT PARISOT took up the only three undamaged planes and engaged the Messerschmitts. Parisot was shot down, the captain bailed out, and Barret managed to bring his battle-scarred plane home safely. The French pilots were up against terrific odds as day after day the Germans poured new reinforcements into the battle. As the Germans advanced, the field had to be moved back again and again, while enemy bombers smashed the ever-lengthening supply lines along roads already choked with refugees. Then news came that the Nazis had taken Paris and that Petain had called for peace. Barret decided to go on to North Africa and offer his services there. Agnadel was strangely calm about the invasion of his homeland by the Nazis. He still persisted in his mistrust of the working people as ignorant rabble, but due to his rigid belief in the duties of an officer and a gentleman, he asked to go along with Barret. Unfortunately, the captain was forced to bail out during a skirmish with six Heinkels, and was lying in a hospital recovering from his wounds when Barret left France to continue the fight in North Africa—a fight which was to be continued from England two years later.

PART II

HE landed hard, was dragged by his chute for some distance, but finally was clear. It was a beautiful Summer night, the stars were out, but somewhat dimmed by the rays of searchlights and the explosions of anti-aircraft shells. Jerry had a large investment in the Paris region and much equipment to protect it.

When he had ascertained that he had no broken bones, no serious injury, Barret climbed out of his suit and started to gather the parachute, to hide it. This was harder to do than he had figured, and he found a good reason to stop.

The Germans knew very well that a British bomber had been brought down in this zone; they could not have missed the fire. Barret had beheld it, while floating down, zigzagging through the night. He had seen the heavy flash of the final explosion somewhere a few miles away. The Germans knew there should be five men aboard, and would find only one, the wireless operator. With Teutonic precision, they would then reason that four Britishers were wandering at large within a radius of five or six miles.

Moreover, they would not find the chute before day, and by that time they probably would have collared Barret and his comrades. If they had not, finding the chute would not help them much. The sensible thing to do, in fact, was to look for the Germans and get it over with. The coast, a few minutes by plane, was a devilishly long distance to walk, and the Free Zone was almost as far. Moreover, the Free Zone meant internment by the Vichy French, who had no love for the British, and, at least officially, deep resentment against former members of the French Army serving with them. In theory, Barret was a deserter, liable to immediate execution if caught. In practice, it meant perhaps two years in military prison.

He investigated his surroundings. He had dropped in a gently sloping field fringed by woods on one side, slashed through by a narrow gauge railway on a slight embankment. He had been lucky: there were poles along that rail, presumably wires. He figured that he must be some forty miles away from Paris, north and slightly west. He followed the rails until he came to a rather narrow road lined with poplars, what the maps call a cantonal road. The distant rumble of guns was dwindling; silence was returning to the countryside.

He wondered whether he should strip himself of his pistol. A weapon was a temptation to resist. But he disliked the idea of disarming himself too soon. His captors might appreciate a souvenir. He came to a road marker, a low stone, and knelt to feel for the letters and numbers with his fingers. As he did so, he realized that he still hoped to escape, as he did not want to strike a light.

He could make out figures, a three

and an eight, but no words. He walked on. His knees pained him. In the distance he heard the sputtering of motors. When he turned south, he could see a ruddy radiation. Something was burning in the distance. With good reason, as tons of bombs had been dropped. Target: a famous French factory, now turning out light tanks for the German government.

In a way, he decided, he was lucky. This had been his sixth jump from a plane, aside from practice jumps. The fifth had been the worst—he had gone into the Channel. Picked up without a scratch, to go into a hospital with pneumonia forty-eight hours later. December is a poor month for bathing.

He had been unfit for pursuit work, but had managed to pass for bombardment, with a promise of reinstatement, although he was getting on. He would be twenty-five in some months. Personally, he thought bombardment more strenuous. Responsibility—three, four, five guys beside yourself.

Well, it was over. Too bad, for by the middle of July he would have been with an American Squadron. France, North Africa, Portugal, America, England, France again, and probably a prison camp somewhere in Germany. The food was rotten, but they let packages through. He wondered what had happened to Hankins, the navigator, to Kendall and Miles, the gunners. They had gone first.

HE passed over a little stone bridge, came against a low stone wall. The road seemed to have stopped, and he fumbled into a wooden gate. A dog yapped once, twice, stopped. Everything stopped. He could feel the remote vibrations of the guns flooding into his ears. A dog does not quit barking by himself; there must be someone near. He heard the dog again, rasping a low challenge. He could see the tops of trees, like ornamental metal work spread against the sky, but no roof, no building.

He hoisted himself over the gate, felt the hard path under his boots walked a few steps.

"Anyone there?" he hailed, in French.

"I have a mean dog here," a woman's voice answered. "You'd better be careful."

"I don't want to hurt anyone," he said. "I'm lost."

"Who are you?"

"*Aviateur anglais.*"

"Come this way, then."

He followed the voice, stumbled into a door. He heard the rattling of metal objects. Then a weak, yellow light bloomed, spread. Near an old-fashioned wood stove stood a tall, rangy woman, no longer young, bare-footed, clad in a shawl and black skirt over a heavy night garment. She had a hatchet in her hand. Before her, silent, stiff-legged and suspicious, was a large dog, resembling a big terrier, probably a *boulet d'Auvergne*. She considered Barret a moment, rested the weapon on the sink.

"Down, Poilu. Sit down, mister. The men will be back soon." She dipped a ladle into a pot kept warm in the ashes of the fireplace flanking the stove, filled a plate, put it and a large piece of bread before Barret. "Eat. That's all we have."

"It's good soup, madame," he said, sincerely.

"Could do with a hunk of bacon fat."

"Where are the Germans?"

"There's a permanent post at Abre-Seul. We'll probably have a patrol here, by six, seven o'clock, asking questions. Not very harsh, Wurtemburgers. But they have Prussians and special police at Lantes."

She remained near the sink. The dog was sprawled, his head on his paws, but every time Barret shifted his feet, his ears moved and his little gleaming eyes showed. He finished the first plate, another. Then he searched his pockets for cigarettes. And he laid tablets of chocolate on the table.

"If you'll accept those, madame."

"Thank you. The children'll love it."

He smoked. She replied to his questions guardedly. Then, almost without a preliminary sound, the door opened and two men entered. The one in the lead was fairly tall, gaunt, with broad bony shoulders. He wore a faded blouse and patched corduroy trousers. He held a stout stick in his fist. He looked from Barret to the woman.

"Says he's English." She added, reflectively, "Speaks French well."

"Ah, yes." The peasant started to question Barret, in a slow, leisurely voice.

"Going out back—" the other man said. He walked behind Barret. And, unexpectedly, the flyer found his arms held from the rear. The peasant leaned over the table, took his pistol. He verified the loading, aimed it at Barret's head and warned, "Not a peep!" He addressed his wife. "Get the others in. I knew there was something wrong when I found you'd taken the dog in. Smart work."

The woman led the dog out, came back with three men. Middle-aged chaps, field workers in appearance. One of them had a pistol, the others shotguns.

"Where did you leave the others?"

"I'm alone." Barret was puzzled. "If you mean my comrades in the plane, they jumped before I did. You'll find my parachute—"

"Never mind that. We don't like stories. Leon—"

"Yes." And one of the others caught Barret's head, stuffed a rag into his mouth. Then, producing a cord, he lashed him to the chair.

"Dubaille, you've seen him before, sure?"

"As sure as I see you now, Joseph. I can't remember just when, just where, but I've seen his mug. Some time ago."

Joseph laughed shortly. "You made a couple of mistakes, boche. You came straight here. And you speak French too well. Yes, I've helped Englishmen before, and I know how they talk. You thought it would be a good idea to start tonight, when we know there are Englishmen around. Now, you're cooked, done for. All right, we'll all go tomorrow. But you'll go tonight." The man reflected. "We'll make a bargain. We'll let you write a letter home. And we'll see that it's mailed. No tricks—one of us knows German. In exchange, tell us just one thing—who sold us out? Maybe we can find him, and you don't care what happens to him. All right?"

Barret nodded. He was looking at Dubaille, who glared back at him.

"Paper and pencil, Melie." When the woman had brought the things asked for, he resumed, "Now, word of honor, you write down the name, and you can write your letter. And don't make anything up. We know who's likely to tip you off."

Leon released Barret's right hand, held the paper with his thumb. Barret started to write: "Ask Dubaille if old Grandet ever got his job back with Agnadel's."

"Grandet? It can't be Grandet," said Joseph.

"Well, he has two sons prisoners."

"Just a moment," Dubaille said slowly. His eyes puckered, the thick gray mustache bristled. "Grandet—Agnadel? What do you know about that?"

"Hallway, Chateau," Barret wrote, adding the date.

"Oh, you're the other slob," Dubaille exclaimed. He turned on the others, who were staring at him: "Maybe—maybe he's not a boche. I know where I saw him before—" He explained rapidly.

"He's a friend of Agnadel; that's the same thing."

Dubaille started to perspire. "Still, a man's life isn't a hazelnut. It counts, don't it? Old Celestin told me, later, that both young Guitres and the American officer were disgusted—"

"We'll let you speak, but no shouting, eh?"

CHAPTER VI

BRIEF SANCTUARY

TEN minutes later, the matter was more or less cleared up. These peasants were no fools. One of them had served in North Africa, and checked up on that angle. It was decided that Barret would be hidden until other men higher up could be consulted as to the best means of escape. With the proper disguise, it was possible to reach the coast in a couple of days. There, some other arrangements would be made.

Meanwhile, Barret was to be hidden in Dubaille's home. The artisan lived in a workmen's tenement, on the outskirts of a small town fifteen kilometers away. The aviator was warned to lie down in the ditch if a German patrol passed by, and not to worry. The soldiers

Barret was to be hidden in a workmen's tenement on the outskirts of a small town fifteen kilometers away.

went very fast and seldom looked for trouble. Most of them were reservists, many above forty.

Barret had been risking his life for almost three years, yet these elderly French civilians amazed him. To face death in combat, with the flag figuratively flying, was one thing. The constant grind of fear when endangering not only yourself but your family and your friends, must be very much harder. Dubaille and the others incurred death for several reasons: they were out after curfew, they carried dangerous weapons, and they were aiding and abetting an enemy of the German realm.

"One gets used to it," Dubaille said. "It was tougher at the start. They'd shoot twenty, thirty guys just for a lesson. But since they're fighting the Russians, they haven't so many guys to chase around after us."

They entered the building—Dubaille lived on the fourth floor—through a complicated pathway, across gardens, through shifting planks in fences, by crawling through a cellar vent.

"It's all nonsense," Dubaille said as they ascended the creaking stairs. "This Sioux-on-the-warpath business. There's eight families in this house, and everybody knows I hide fugitives. But the janitor insists we don't pass his lodge, because he has to report to the police."

Barret grinned. The feud between tenants and janitor was not ended by any emergency. Dubaille led him to a narrow space under the roof, supplied with a mattress, a pitcher of water, sundry utensils.

"You can smoke and even have a light," the guide said. "I made things snug. They've searched the attic a couple of times, but this is screened pretty well. My old woman'll give you food through the top of our kitchen

closet. It's whitewashed and they never spotted it. She'll rap twice on the floor if there's a search."

"How far is Agnadel's factory from here?"

"Four kilometers further, other side of town. The house's yet another five hundred meters."

"You don't think I could trust him?"

"He'd turn you in. He's working for Them. Oh, he's decorated, a hero, and he makes speeches to the Patriotic Youth organizations. About rebuilding France through work and discipline. But they're all pro-boche. The old sow, the little de Guitres cow, everybody. I have to work for Them, too. But that bunch has them to dinner—officers and boche factory inspectors."

"Maybe he has to, like you."

"Him? A week ago he called in the foremen. 'I'm very sorry,' he says, 'but defectives and rejects are increasing. I've ascertained two men responsible. For the others, if they prefer to be shipped to Germany instead of working quietly here, close to their families, it's their business.' The two guys were taken away. Probably shot. And who the hell gave the Germans a list of the skilled artisans who'd gone to work on farms? He collaborates, the swine." He broke off. "I have to get some sleep; it's four and I have to be at work at seven. I'll be back around eight tonight. My wife will feed you."

Barret did not expect to sleep when he stretched out. But the fatigue of the flight, the strain of the jump, the miles he had walked, asserted themselves as soon as he relaxed. He slept nine hours, until Madame Dubaille lost patience and awoke him. She passed up a bowl of coffee substitute and a piece of bread.

"This isn't the Grand Hotel," she said tartly. "If I had my way, you wouldn't be here. But that crazy old coot I married wants excitement, and he'll have us all shot, as many as we are—the kids, me, the tenants."

She was a bit startled when she found out that Barret understood French perfectly, and softened. From time to time throughout the day, she sat in front of the closet, knitting and talking, to keep him company. As a great favor, one of her children, a boy of fourteen was permitted to exchange greetings with the fugitive. The kid held up his fingers in a V and said, "Hurrah for England."

"He's crazy to go out nights," she told Barret after she had chased him away. "I wonder how they'll be after the war, after all this excitement." She gave Barret—who listened to her stretched on his stomach, looking down through the trap-door—graphic little pictures of war, in a calm tone. "It was queer to see people you'd known all your life marched away like criminals, and realize they'd be shot back of the cemetery! They had old Grandet in jail for two days, and it sobered him, you bet.

"Yes, he's back to work, and he keeps his big mouth shut. You know, Old Lady Agnadel always hated him because he was partners with her man at the start, and everybody always said he had as much to do with inventing that pump as Agnadel, only Agnadel was smart and

In the beginning the Germans used to shoot twenty or thirty innocent towns-people just for a lesson.

got the patent in his name. She knows he tells around how she used to cook for them at the start, and she's tried to get him to move. Even offered him money. She's high-hat, and you'd never think that she and her mother used to make their living doing embroidery for the church which the priests gave them to do out of charity, because they were well-born." The fingers flew, the needles clicked. "She was almost thirty when that Laurent came along. You'd have thought he was a prince of the blood or something!"

DUBAILLE returned at eight-fifteen, and came up to see Barret at once. He brought a single-sheet newspaper, headlining Russian defeats, and a package of cigarettes.

"They're working for you," he announced. "You must give me your measurements. They'll fake a *feuille de route*, stating that you are a discharged soldier from Algeria, going home to Normandy. We'll get you aboard a train, and have someone watching for you at Caen. The boches have two of your mates at the gendarmerie lockup."

"Do you know their names?"

"No. Both sergeants. They took an officer, too, but he escaped, after killing one man and wounding another." Dubaille shrugged. "They'll shoot him if they get him. And I don't know what we're going to do with him. He's hard to keep because he's hurt. He made us understand that he didn't want to make trouble for us, wanted us to lay him on the road. He's just a lad."

"Twenty-one," Barret said soberly.

That was his navigator, John McIvor Hankins, he was sure. And he was surprised at his energy, his heroism. Harkins was a tall, rangy, awkward young fellow of the "silly-ass" type, Barret had always thought. Good at his job, but a grinning, amiable fool given to bad puns and stale jokes. A barmaid's fancy, with his mop of fine, blond hair, baby skin and childish blue eyes.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"About six kilometers out, small farm, under a stable. We got a doctor all right, who set his leg, but he's started to have fever, and you can hear him from outside. If the Germans happened to make a search, they couldn't miss him. They'd burn the place. Couldn't bring him here, even if he kept quiet. Got to be carried. Doctor says he has to be taken somewhere else. If the doc's seen going too often, the German doctors will check up. They're afraid of epidemics, because they know people aren't eating much."

"Where could you take him?"

"Just now? I don't know. The retired tax-collector has space, but he's sure his house has been watched for some time. He had an Englishman hidden for six weeks, and the idiot got himself caught, taking the air, not a mile from the house. The Germans couldn't prove anything, but they're watching."

"You think they'd shoot him, really?"

"Oh, yes. He surrendered to a patrol just after he landed. Then they left two

guys to guard him while they looked for his stuff, and he took a gun away from one and got off. The way they look at it, it's murder." Dubaille sighed. "It's hard to dump a young guy and leave him. But—that farmer has kids."

Barret thought this over for a while.

"I could try something. Is there any way I can see Agnadel?"

"He'd turn you in right away."

"I don't think so," Barret protested. "I knew him for months, we were pretty good friends. Somewhere, in the factory, in his house, there should be room. The Germans don't suspect him. I think I could talk to him."

"Well," Dubaille said, after some arguing, "he isn't hard to see at night, if you want to take a chance. He doesn't stay at the factory, but he is in a brick building back of his house almost every night, working. Since he's taken over the factory, he thinks he's an inventor. The Germans have a permanent post at the factory, and put sentries around the residence. But I guess you'd be safe if I'd go with you as far as the door. They know me and would think it's business. If anything goes wrong, I can always say you stopped me on the street to show you the way. No need to worry about the curfew around there because guys are changing shifts all the time."

They left the house as soon as it was dark. They were stopped three times, twice by French police, once by a German patrol. But the human element asserted itself; the men were carrying out a routine, were not suspicious. They flashed a light on the papers offered them by Dubaille, grumbled and went on. They did not notice that Barret's cap was too large, that his overalls bagged in the middle and were too short for arms and legs.

"It's a few steps over that way," Dubaille said at last. "If there's anything doing, you can trust Celestin to bring us word. If not, farewell." He walked away rapidly, melted into the night.

Barret found the door, hesitated. His heart was beginning to pound, his thoughts swirled, seemed to fuse into panic. There was no retreat after he entered. He must win his point or be turned over to the Germans. He was cut off from Dubaille, could never locate the house alone.

SOLID steps came near. The aviator distinguished a silhouette in the darkness, a few feet away. There was the outline of a bucket helmet, the faint gleam of the bayonet. The German sentry said nothing; he stood there and waited.

Barret knocked. Steps can be as personal as fingerprints, and he remembered Agnadel's firm stride.

"What is it?" The door had opened on a dimly lighted hall.

"Message. Message for—for Miss de Guitres."

"What's this nonsense?" Then, as Barret had hoped, Agnadel was unwilling to be overheard by the sentry, who had come nearer. "Come in. Who are you, what have you to say to Miss de Guitres?"

The door was closed.

"It's you I must speak to, Captain," Barret said.

"You can see me at the factory tomorrow."

"It's urgent, Captain."

"Ah—" Agnadel seemed to hesitate for a moment. "Wait two minutes." Deliberate, careful as always, he switched off the light in the combined machine-shop and laboratory, crossed the hall, turned on the light in another room and called, "Come in."

Barret entered a sort of large office, furnished with an old-fashioned desk, three or four comfortable chairs, filing-cases. There were framed photographs of the factory on the walls. The young man's heart beat hard and fast when his host, after checking the window curtains, turned to face him. Would he—

"Hello, Barret," Agnadel was saying quietly. "I thought I recognized your voice."

He showed no excitement, little surprise, extended his hand casually. He wore civilian clothing, a work-coat of some thin, light tan stuff. But he had changed very little. His face was the same pale hue. Perhaps he was somewhat fleshier about the jaws and under the eyes, and there was a little gray near his temples. But the old expression of lofty

self-confidence, almost of arrogance, remained.

"Sit down, sit down—" He indicated an easy-chair, settled before the desk. With a casual, polite gesture, he snapped up the lid of a cigarette box, pushed it nearer to his guest. Barret was stirred by many memories, dreaded to find an enemy in this old comrade, and found it hard to speak.

Agnadel nodded and smiled.

"It's all right, Barret. We shall have to find some way of getting you to Switzerland or to the Free Zone," he declared at onee.

"Oh, you know I'm—"

"Come, I have normal perception, Barret. This isn't the carnival season, so you must have a reason for your disguise. I know that the United States and Germany are at war. And I know you would be tired of an internment camp. We'll study ways and means. Where did you escape from?"

"Nowhere, Captain. That is to say—" and Barret went on to explain briefly. When he had finished he could see that Agnadel, who had been ready to assist him if he came from an internment camp, was displeased by his explanation.

The tall, handsome Frenchman tapped on the edge of a desk with one finger four or five times, which was the equivalent of nervous pacing in the average man.

"That changes the situation, my lad," he said, his voice very cool. The finger lifted to indicate a telephone. "My strict duty is to telephone the gendarmes. However, for the sake of old friendship, I give you permission to go and be hanged elsewhere."

"Why, Captain?"

"Your question is ridiculous. You admit that you are a British aviator. You are therefore an enemy of France. You, or your colleagues, have dropped bombs within a hundred meters of here. You damaged my factory twice."

"War, ordered duty, Captain."

"I do not argue. But you are on one side, I on the other." He glanced at his watch. "I expect you to be gone in five minutes. Ten minutes afterward, I shall inform the French police of your visit here."

The aviator distinguished a silhouette in the darkness only a few feet away—the outline of a bucket helmet, the faint gleam of a bayonet.

CHAPTER VII

A RELUCTANT HOST

AGNADEL looked at his watch and settled back in his chair.

"You remember de Guitres?" he asked. "So young, so noble, so full of life—The British murdered him."

"Murdered him?"

"Almost two years ago, at Mers-el-Kebir. He was on one of the ships of the Oran fleet." The finger tapped three times. "The most abominable breach of faith in modern history. Turning heavy guns on ships at anchor."

"I'm sorry about Odet," Barret said sincerely.

"Yes, sorry. His father died four months ago, broken in health, broken-hearted, his only son killed, his line ended, not in loyal war but in a criminal, unjustified attack. Your time is up, my lad. You had best leave."

Barret's chest tightened. He wiped the perspiration from his face, licked his lips. "No. I am curious to see something for myself. To see you, Captain, reach out for that telephone, to betray a man who served France as long as she wished to be served." He met Agnadel's eyes squarely. "Perhaps you might do it when alone, Captain, but I don't think you can before a witness."

"Why not?"

"Because you are a soldier, a French gentleman."

"And you are a bandit, a criminal. You come here and slay French people without a declaration of war. Do you know how many French workmen last night's raid killed?"

"No. But I know that French workmen feel that they died for France, and that they are willing to chance death to be rid of the Germans."

"Newspaper talk, propaganda."

"I landed in uniform. You see me. Every Frenchman I have met, so far, has wanted to help me. I found food, shelter and clothing. I was led here by a man who risked his life to assist me. I did not read that in a newspaper."

Agnadel smiled scornfully. "The populace will always side against constituted authority. They long for the days when their whims were law, when the man who paid their wages was a milch cow. Discipline, work, irk them. Speak to a Frenchman of good class, you'll hear another story. Defeat has sobered them." He nodded toward the telephone. "You have four minutes."

"May I have a cigarette, Captain?"

"Help yourself."

Barret smoked quietly. He knew that if he rose and left, Agnadel would telephone—that he would be picked up inside of thirty minutes by the French police, turned over to the Germans. If he stuck it out, there was a chance, if he understood anything about Agnadel. The man was looking at his watch.

"I heard you were hurt, Captain."

"Broken arm. A puncture of the left thigh and a piece of flesh ripped from my ribs. Seven weeks in the hospital."

"But for that, you might have been with me, Captain."

"I?" Agnadel colored slightly. "Ah, yes, I recall. Things were not clear then. Britain had not treated us as an enemy." Agnadel gestured mildly. "I wish you would leave, Barret. I'll let you take your chances. In your case, I can allow myself to remain neutral."

"I knew you couldn't telephone, Captain."

"Why did you know?" Agnadel seemed puzzled.

"Hospitality. You were wounded—" and Barret told him about Hankins. "I'm putting his life in your hands, Captain," he concluded. "The people he is with cannot keep him."

The finger resumed tapping.

"It would be difficult to help. The Germans have an anti-aircraft gun in my park, with a permanent crew."

"The less reason for them to suspect anyone would be bold enough. I know you would try to save an enemy from death, if helpless. That is why I came here."

"But the risk?"

"You could disavow everything. Claim it was done without your knowledge. You have a house and a half-dozen servants—"

"Only five. There were eight. . . ."

I am not worried about myself," Agnadel added loftily. "But I have women depending on me."

BARRET knew that Madame Agnadel would not hesitate to telephone, but he remembered de Guitres' statement: They live in mirrors. "I know they would not refuse to take in a wounded man," Barret said. The psychological approach to the captain had worked very well, presenting to him a standard Agnadel, knightly and incapable of turning a wounded man from his door, no matter the risk. And he knew also that Agnadel cared nothing for his, Barret's opinion, but was admiring himself in the heroic role. "Nevertheless, I think it's better to keep the ladies in ignorance. They can honestly say they knew nothing, if events turn out badly, meanwhile they will not be worried. As to ways and means, I believe your Celestin would know."

For the first time, Agnadel really seemed angry.

"Do you mean that he has been—mixing in those—things?"

"I don't know, Captain. But he is of the people, and he must know things you ignore purposely."

"Yes," Agnadel conceded. "He has relatives in these parts." He went to the wall, pushed a button. "He'll be here in a few moments." The tall Frenchman pressed the tips of his fingers on his brow. "It is ironical, this business. You know what I am working on? A sort of an air mine. Against bombers. Probably cannot be developed in time for use in this war. It is lost. But the future remains. A strong man may replace Petain. We need a Louis XIV."

"You called for your snack early, Monsieur Laurent," Celestin said, entering. He saw Barret, recognized him and bowed. The young man had the impression that the butler rather expected to see him.

"Lay it aside, Celestin." Agnadel looked at the servant. "You've been with us a long time. I can trust you, I know." He outlined the situation. "Do you think he could be brought in, kept away somewhere?"

Celestin

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Laurent. Like the others."

"The others?"

"Yes, Monsieur Laurent. There was Herbois, you know, the man they were looking for? And, way back in 1940, in the fall, two officers who were escaping. I put them in the room next to the archives. It has two couches, is very comfortable."

"You did not tell me about it."

"I feared Monsieur Laurent would not approve or might be worried."

"Thoughtful of you," Agnadel snapped. "But how do you get them in?"

"Monsieur Laurent means in and out. You know the drain from the carp pool in the park? It crosses the orchard and has an outlet on the side road, below the wall, closed by an iron grill. That grill can be lifted, and a man can creep through. The soldiers from the gun never go far at night. And there is no inside patrol. One enters the house through the cellar vent, climbs to the

kitchen and pantry, and ascends by the servants' stairs."

"But the drain is four feet deep, Celestin, and the current is strong."

"Not now, Monsieur Laurent. And there's a sluice."

"Have I had any guests lately?"

"Not for a few months, Monsieur Laurent. We had that German gentleman in the Maintenon Room, and he was a professor in civilian life. He asked permission to use your archives and books, so I did not dare put anyone up."

"Well, do what is necessary. This gentleman will remain also. Just a moment, Celestin—" Agnadel was irritated. "As long as you are so well informed, perhaps you know of a doctor who'd handle the case—"

"Why, Madame Agnadel's physician, Monsieur Laurent."

"Dr. Labrosse? You mean he—"

"He treated the British gentleman. He spoke to me today about him, but I said since there were soldiers stationed in the park, perhaps it was risky. But of course, if Monsieur Laurent orders it, it is a different matter."

As he spoke, Celestin took the napkin off the cold meal he had brought, added a second glass. "Will that be everything for now? Will Monsieur Laurent retire as usual, or wait up?"

"I'll be up."

There was the sound of heavy boots marching outside, guttural orders; the sentry was being relieved. And a familiar vibration teased the ears—the pounding of guns to the south. The Paris factories were being raided again. Agnadel walked to the window, drew aside the thick dark curtain. The night was stabbed with criss-crossing searchlights.

"It would be odd," he said, "if some of your people dropped a bomb on us at this time." He returned to his chair. "Celestin has been with us for thirty-five years. Footman, second man, butler. Yet he gambled our lives, our liberty. That's gratitude. If my mother knew it, she would weep."

"Or be proud of him. She's French."

"Perhaps," Agnadel admitted without conviction.

He started talking about the Germans, their efficiency, their organization. They were modern men in a modern world. Barret knew the theme, the chant of the collaborationists. He had seen French newspapers. He could also discern growing doubt and uncertainty in Agnadel, a rare manifestation. The man was wondering when, how he had allowed himself to be persuaded to shelter a wounded Englishman. The reaction was starting.

"You remember Parisot?" Barret asked. "He once told me, 'The captain's not a man of today. If you try to understand him on that basis, you'll know nothing. He's out of the sixteenth century.'"

Agnadel looked at Barret earnestly.

"Parisot said that? Extraordinary." The ex-captain lifted his hand in graceful surprise. "He was an excellent pilot, a good comrade and a brave chap, but he never struck me as a man who thought very deeply." He paused, added, "What a diversified crowd we were in the squadron. We lived and fought side by side, yet how little we knew each other. Fancy his saying that!"

Barret could almost see Parisot's grin, the shock of black hair, the fringe of beard, the impish personality. Well, it was in a good cause, provided another mirror. Parisot and de Guitres, both dead, were helping him. He drank deeply, to steady a faint throbbing in his chest. He felt very tired, and he wanted to weep. The days and nights stretched ahead endlessly. This was settled, but he had to escape.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW HIDEOUT

THE time dragged. The shooting had ended, though searchlights still probed the sky. No plane had strayed in this direction. Agnadel rose at last. "Better go over to the house. Carry something—this." He handed Barret a large box. "That'll explain your presence."

They left the building on the park side. A German cut across the lawn toward the path they followed. "Lovely evening, Mr. Agnadel," he said. "It's a

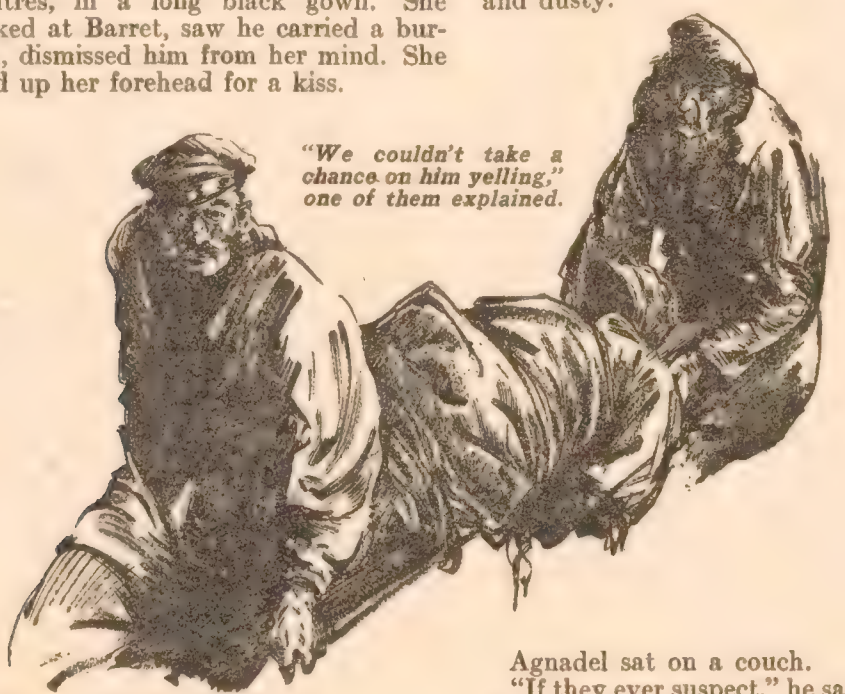
shame for men to die on such a night." His French was correct, harsh. "The stubborn English!"

Agnadel chatted with him two or three minutes.

"A charming man," he informed Barret. "Cultured, excellent piano player. Good industrial family." He walked up the stone stoop, the door opened. "Anything new, Celestin?"

"No, Monsieur Laurent. Madame has retired."

They climbed up the stairs. The curtains were drawn, the light very dim. On the first landing a door opened and a slender silhouette appeared. Miss de Guitres, in a long black gown. She looked at Barret, saw he carried a burden, dismissed him from her mind. She held up her forehead for a kiss.



"We couldn't take a chance on him yelling," one of them explained.

"You promised to be back by ten, Laurent," she said reproachfully. "I missed you. Mother was not very well, and the lieutenant had to go on post when the alert came. It was dull."

"Sorry, dear. I was kept busy." Agnadel brushed her forehead with his lips again. "Good night. We'll try to find something amusing tomorrow."

Miss de Guitres left, and Agnadel led the way up to the floor on which Barret had never been. He opened a door, switched on the light. A spacious room, lined with shelves loaded with books and green cartons was revealed. Mechanically, Agnadel made sure that the curtains were snug. He gestured for Barret to rest the box on a table. Then he put out the light, went along the hall, opened another door. "This should be the place," he said.

The room was fairly large, with one sloping side. An unbelievable number of trunks were stacked on one side, leaving space for two old couches. Only one chair, a dilapidated upholstered affair, and some crockery toilet articles. The floor was covered with a sort of gray felt carpet. Black cloth was tacked over the mansard window. It smelled close and dusty.

Agnadel sat on a couch.

"If they ever suspect," he said, "they'll find this easily."

"Do you think they will suspect?"

"No. I am on good terms with them, and there's the post in the park. Once in a while I am asked to put up some important official. But naturally I don't keep them in the garret. They only came up here once, to seal the pigeon cote in the turret."

"Why didn't you get married?" Barret asked suddenly.

"Married?" Agnadel looked at him in surprise. "There was the mourning for her brother and then for her father." He smiled. "I understand they do not

observe such things too closely in America. But this is France, Barret."

They waited for a long time. Then they heard vague noises, muffled, cautious steps. The door opened, Celestin came in. He nodded to his master, beckoned. Two peasants stumbled in, carrying a long bundle. Panting, perspiring, they rested it on one of the couches, while Celestin put sheets on the other. Barret looked on with an expression of horror on his face.

"Can't help it, mister," one of the men said. "We couldn't take a chance on him yelling. We had to bunk in the ditch twice."

They had brought in Pilot Officer Hankins tied to a plank, and with a gag in his mouth! Now they set to work unfastening him, and Barret leaned over his friend. "You all right, old man? You won't yell, will you?"

Hankins' head rolled negatively. His silky hair was covered with dirt, his unshaven cheeks grimy. When the gag was removed, one of the men ready to bring down his hand over his mouth, he smiled feebly and said, "This is a bloody outrage, Bobby."

"These chaps were worried—"

"I know. Started mess myself. No business popping the Jerries. Seemed like a good idea at the time."

A little man wearing a black coat, gray trousers tucked into stout boots, bustled in. He nodded to Agnadel, stripped off coat and vest, pushed a battered straw hat to the back of his bald head. He had heavy brows and a shaggy mustache, resembled a miniature Clemenceau.

"Rough handling, but he has the constitution to stand it," he said briskly. "You speak English? Tell him he has a splendid physique and the courage to match it."

Hankins grinned when Barret translated. "Tell him I enjoyed every minute of it, won't you?"

CATHERINE appeared with a huge kettle of hot water. Hankins was stripped from head to foot. A bandage was swathed around his chest. He had been shot from back to front, but there was no lung puncture. Doctor Labrosse gave him an injection. "Morphine," he explained. He changed the dressing, verified the splints on the broken leg. "A bit primitive, but it is good." While Catherine washed the sick man, the doctor asked Barret, "You'll be with him? He is in no danger, but he'll have fever. Don't let that worry you. I'm leaving medications and instructions. Now I'll give him camphor oil. Watch."

Hankins shuddered like a sick horse, but was most quiet and docile. The men who had carried him in left without a word. The doctor washed his hands, looked at Agnadel. "Laurent, I owe you an apology. You're a Frenchman." He dressed and bustled out. Then the servants tidied up, left.

They were all so calm, so matter-of-fact, Barret thought, yet of all the persons who had been in this room tonight, he was the only one not liable to execution by the Nazis.

Agnadel lingered, looking down at the sick man with the expression of a fussy housewife who discovers the dog has been sick on the parlor rug. He was visibly annoyed, puzzled.

"I must turn in," he said at last. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Thank you, Captain."

"Oh, I beg of you!" the Frenchman protested mechanically. "It's nothing, nothing at all."

The door closed. The place, under the slates, was hot. Barret loosened the curtain after turning out the light, opened the window a few inches. Hankins started to talk, and he went to sit at his side, holding his hand. The wounded man's clutch was like a vise.

"That you, Bobby? Where are the others?"

"They've gone. You're all right. Just take it easy."

"Kendall?"

"He's fine. Miles, too."

"Snotty Mafflet?"

That was the wireless operator. Had been. He had remained in the plane, his head bashed by a twenty-five millimeter shell.

"Mafflet's all right, too."

There was a long silence, save for Hankins' heavy breathing.

Dr. Labrosse

"That you, Bobby? where's Mafflet?" the sick man went through his set of questions again. Barret replied. Then there was a pause, until Hankins started again. "That you Bobby? Where's Snotty Mafflet?"

It was an insane night. Barret stifled with the window closed. Before turning on the light, he had to replace the curtain securely. Hankins was thirsty, Hankins was the opposite. Hankins saw searchlights and he spotted Messerschmitts coming fast behind. When all else failed, he started to sing. Toward morning, Barret brooded upon how easily the pest could be quieted.

"Super-Yank Barret, eh, Bobby—"

"Easy does it, Johnny."

When Madame Agnadel had her gastric upheavals, which were fortunately frequent, Doctor Labrosse came during the day. Otherwise, he had to wait for darkness, enter the park through the drain. He advised Barret to use morphine on the patient when the fever gripped him at night. "Better knock him out for a while than to have our gentle friends coming in."

Hankins had a fine physique, as the doctor had said, and he recovered rapidly. There was usually a bad spell at twilight, and another around eleven o'clock. The pounding of the anti-aircraft cannon in the park excited him tremendously. "It's quite near, Bobby. You know, I feel very strange, being in a place I never saw from the outside—and that perhaps I'll never see. They'll take me out at night, won't they?"

"You can come back after the war."

Help came to Barret from a good source. Catherine took a great liking to Hankins. She came up whenever she could, even at night, washed him, freshened his hair, beard and face with a damp towel. She knew no English, Hankins spoke little French, but to her he was a wit, just on his comic grimaces and waggling fingers. "*Mon Dieu, que votre camarade peut être rigolot!*" she told Barret. He admitted it. To a simple country girl like Catherine, silly-ass Johnny was entertainment.

When he imitated Doctor Labrosse in garbled French syllables, she shook from stem to stern and patted her rounded throat. He described his own military funeral, with musical effects, drums, horns, trombone. Agnadel did not answer as well to Hankins' humor.

"Are many Englishmen like him?" he asked Barret. "I took two trips to England—we had business with a Birmingham firm—and the people I met appeared very different." Nevertheless, he was very affable to his guest, used what stiff phrases of English he had retained from school.

When all was quiet in the chateau, which was often, so far as the attic floor was concerned, Barret went into the archives. The modern books were down below, and he made the acquaintance of what the right-thinking French women of 1900-1910 liked to read. Fortunately, there were bound volumes of illustrated magazines, carrying through to 1921, which Hankins enjoyed. Confinement was easier to endure than he had imagined and he even found a certain pleasure in the routine.

ONE evening, about six o'clock, Hankins was beginning his restless chatter, preliminary to a spell of fever, when there were light steps outside. Barret laid down his book, put out his cigarette, and went to stand near the door. Hankins snapped back for a moment, kept very still. The glass handle of the door moved, the panel swung open.

Barret drew the person inside, shut the door and rested his back against it.

Miss de Guitres looked at him, then at the wounded man, who had propped himself on one elbow. Hankins resembled the classical beachcomber. And Barret knew that he did not look any better—bare-footed, bearded, clad in corduroy trousers and undershirt. She lifted one hand, and seemed about to scream. But her chin set, her eyes flashed.

"What are you doing here?"

"We'll explain, Miss de Guitres."

"That is very kind of you."

"Mr. Agnadel knows we are here."

"That's fortunate."

"You may recall me, Miss de Guitres. I had the honor of meeting you, two years ago."

"Mr. Barret, the American?"

"Yes, miss."

"And you presumed on an old friendship to get Mr. Agnadel into a very serious situation. You are not selfish!" Olympe was furious, and her words crackled. "You've been entertaining my maid up here, don't deny that! I thought it strange she always came down from here when she was called."

"I assure you, miss, that everything was proper. My comrade is seriously wounded. He has a broken leg. He—" Barret looked at Hankins. The tall man had dropped back upon the pillow, his head was turned toward the wall. One big hand, with long fingers, drooped to the floor. "Oh."

He stepped to the couch, lifted Hankins up. Olympe was on the other side. "He's still very weak, isn't he? Hold him this way—don't let his head drop." She opened the flannel shirt, looked at the bandage. "That's all right." She went to the washstand, poured some drops into a glass of water. "You need not worry, Mr. Barret. I'm competent. I took training with the *Dames de France* during the war. Did hospital work. I think it's just the shock of seeing me. The poor fellow thought he might be betrayed."

She held the glass to Hankins' lips. He drank a few swallows.

"Thanks, thanks," he murmured weakly. But as she turned to replace the glass, Barret saw his friend's eye open, gleam intelligently, close again.

Olympe came back and smoothed the sheet, adjusted the pillow.

"He's an English officer," Barret said.

"A sick man has no nationality, Mr. Barret." The reproof was very stiff. "And if Mr. Agnadel receives him under this roof, that makes my duty clear." She melted somewhat. "My brother took a great liking to you, Mr. Barret. He mentioned you in his letters, even the last." She offered her hand. "I know he would have wished me to help you and your friend."

Then she gravely discussed treatment, read the doctor's instructions, sorted out the bottles and boxes. Barret watched her with admiration. She was slender, what the French term a *fausse-maigre*—"pseudo-skinny." Her arms and wrists were plump, rounded, her hands slim and graceful. Her ankles were trim, her feet dainty. At last she smoothed Hankins' fair hair back with a little gesture of the palms.

"There." She turned to Barret. "I'll be in every day. But I don't think Laurent should be told. He would worry about my being mixed up in this. And—" her full under lip curled in amusement—"Madame Agnadel is rather a dragon on the proper place for a young girl."

Hankins popped up as soon as she had left. "It's a cure," he said, "a miraculous cure! That's just what I needed and didn't dare ask for. The soothing hand! You were making a mess of it, Bobby, until I appealed to her mother's instinct."

A while later, Barret ran his fingers over his face, decided to shave. Celestin had left a kit. The result was a decided improvement. Hankins, who really felt ill by that time, nevertheless gestured toward his face, whispered, "Even start, Bobby."

Agnadel commented briefly, "Morale's improving, evidently."

THE next week passed like a flash. Olympe came up for half an hour the first day, remained an hour the second. On the third evening, while Agnadel was

at his research, she dropped in for a long chat.

Barret did the translating. Through him, Hankins talked of himself, his family. Olympe talked of herself, her brother.

That brought an awkward moment. Hankins uttered the most treasonable statements, blamed the tragedy at Oran upon some brain storm of a would-be Nelson, unblushingly told Olympe that most people in Britain had been indignant. In turn, she said it probably had been a necessity of war, just as French artillerymen had had to bombard their own towns.

At the end of that week, the two had evolved a language of their own, and could do without Barret. As a matter of fact, both looked at him for moments, as if he were intruding. He picked up his book after the first greeting from then on. It was hard to concentrate while the other two were exploring languages.

"*Menton,* chin. The chin, *le menton* —" And to make sure there was no misunderstanding, the spot mentioned had to be touched. There were chuckles from Hankins, and, after a while, to Barret's utter amazement, giggles from Olympe. Catherine knew she had been reduced in rank, but took things philosophically. The best portions still were for Hankins.

"You know, Bobby, that little Frenchie's softened me up?" Hankins said at last. "If Jerry doesn't end up by shooting me, I'll—"

"She's engaged to Agnadel—"

"Bah, it's all a mistake. They'd both be unhappy."

"You are his guest. It isn't quite—" Barret hesitated.

"Isn't cricket, what? But see here, Bobby, the chap's not the kind of a fellow who'd ask favors. They're not married, after all. The race is still on. Do you think I could ask her, tell her—"

"She'd probably cool off," Barret explained. "These French engagements are pretty binding. All tied up with families and business."

"She isn't royalty, is she? And look at the merry duke!"

Nevertheless, John Hankins agreed that perhaps it was not quite sporting. He admitted that Barret could feel some compunction, as he had arranged for him to be brought in. He would muffle his heart, steel his resolution. Bite on the bullet, as they say.

CHAPTER IX

DISTANT THUNDER

BY THE time Hankins was able to hobble about, and departure could be faced, he informed Barret that his vocabulary was advanced enough, his strength sufficient, to have a renunciation scene. He owed it to Olympe, he stated, to tell her he had not been trifling, that he loved her, and why he could not hope and so forth. It would be much easier to do if Barret would go into the library for a while.

Barret obeyed, and remained as long as he dared—over an hour. Hankins had not given the signal that all was settled —three light raps on the wall—nor had he heard Olympe's light steps going away. He opened the door, and the two broke slowly, very slowly. Olympe's smooth hair was ruffled, her color was high, her eyes like stars. Hankins was pink, he was smiling and slightly dazed, as if he had been informed that the war was won and that he had inherited a million pounds.

"Mr. Barret, I can trust you—"

"Things sort of strayed," Hankins declared. "It isn't my fault, really. But I couldn't remember the words—"

"Everything went blank," Barret finished for him.

"Yes, quite. I mean—"

"I mean we better keep this quiet. No telling what that chap would do," Barret declared. "He takes everything very seriously, and I don't believe he'll just laugh. Any plans you make are subordinated to our getting away from here. I want to get back to England, whatever you wish."

"So do I, Bobby. But that leg isn't really strong—"

"Bobby"—Olympe used his first name —"you seem angry."

"Your affairs are none of my concern,"

Barret replied. Hankins watched his face, trying to guess the sense of the French words. "But Laurent might very well feel justified in giving us up."

"Oh, he is incapable of that. I'm not so sure he won't be glad. After all, the marriage was arranged when we were children, and we are more like brother and sister."

"When did you discover that?" Barret wondered aloud.

"The last few days," she replied, unconscious of any humor.

"Good. You must give him time to catch up with the notion." Barret shrugged. "In other words, say nothing until after we've gone. You can keep him in ignorance that long?"

"Oh, he never asks any questions."

The matter was explained to Hankins, who surprised Barret by balking. "You don't mean she is to stay here, with him? No. She's only a kid, and they might work on her, put her through that awful marriage. Anyway, I have to talk it over with him."

"A Frenchman doesn't talk about things like that calmly."

"It's the honest thing to do."

"You worry about honesty, now?"

"People can't help falling in love, everybody knows that. It happens all the time. Damn it, he was not so very been very recent, and all that. I owe here, Bobby, you leave me here, start. I'll manage things myself after. You've been very decent, and all that, I owe you no ends of thanks. But in this I must use my own judgment. Personal affair, you know."

"Hold on a bit—say a week."

"All right."

Olympe had to leave, to dress for dinner. The Agnadels were having guests. She slid into Hankins' arms as if she had practiced for years. They kissed as if she were leaving for the Belgian Congo.

Doctor Labrosse, who was among the guests, managed to come up during the evening. He found that Hankins had a slight fever again. Barret very much wanted to ask his advice. But he did not dare bring up the matter, as the old physician was a Frenchman. To his bewilderment, it was Labrosse who mentioned it.

"Things have reached the boiling point with your comrade and the young lady?" When Barret appeared startled, he laughed shortly, explained, "Neither you nor Catherine have been adjusting those bandages. Miss de Guitres worked for me at the hospital for a while." He gestured. "I worried about it from the first. I'm all for the young amusing themselves, but several dozen people's lives depend on secrecy. We must watch out for Agnadel. He is cold and indifferent on the surface, folds back within himself, *un rentré*. The type explodes. I'm taking steps to remove you from here as soon as possible."

TEN times during the evening, Hankins went to the open door, to listen. He hoped that Olympe would manage to get away for a minute. He grew restless, then furious and jealous. The faint notes of the piano that drifted up at intervals goaded him.

"The musical Hun," he snarled. "Your noble friend doesn't mind exposing her to being leered at by the swine. A deal of respect he has for her! And you think I'll leave her here?"

Barret's nerves were not made of steel, he was not in love and did not think Olympe of primary importance. They had an unpleasant argument, involving gratitude, codes of honor, fine points of ethics to start with, ending with personalities, nationalities.

Agnadel interrupted them. He wore a dinner jacket with miniature decorations, appeared very distinguished and handsome.

"Celestin informs me you can be heard on the next floor. There are orderlies in the downstairs hall." He met Hankins' glare calmly. "I understand. Confinement together brings clashes of temperaments. Prevalent among officers in isolated colonial outposts. We'll try to get you moving very soon. But be careful."

He closed the door behind him very quietly. . . .

The two fugitives had a bad scare the following day. Catherine came in, white, trembling with excitement, and took them to hide in a linen room on the

first floor. Another maid piled lavender-scented sheets to screen them as they squatted in the back of a closet. Thirty minutes later, the door was opened, they heard the hammering of boots, orders in German.

As it turned out, it was not a search for them, but a routine inspection. Many days had elapsed since the British bomber had crashed in the region and its crew was presumed to have escaped long since. But a new detachment of troops was to man the cannon in the park, to supply sentries and guards for the chateau, and its commander was a snappy little Bavarian captain who did his job. He went from cellar to attic, investigated even the empty pigeon cote, applied his own seal to several doors.

"This is the floor linen closet," they heard Miss de Guitres announce. "If you desire, I shall have everything moved into the hall."

There was what seemed to Barret an endless wait, then the German's harsh, accented French, "It will not be necessary, *matemoizelle*."

It was mid-afternoon before the coast was clear, and the two emerged, stiff and sore. Catherine, who had hidden their belongings, chatted as she made up the couches again. "Ah, he's a smart one, that shrimp! He came in this room, and he smelled something wrong, I'll swear. He had some of the trunks moved out, opened. He asked Miss de Guitres if soldiers had not been stationed in this attic, and why not. She said because important people often stayed in the house. He sniffed and said, 'Important people—civilians!' "

Olympe came just before dinner. She brought large photographs of the chateau, so that her Johnny could know what the place looked like, and she had found plans. Bound by rather silly politeness, Barret did not wish to tell her she was staying too long, and Catherine had to come to remind her. "Madame has been asking for you."

Barret and Hankins did not speak. Barret justifiably thought the other was jeopardizing them selfishly; Hankins maintained that his personal affairs had nothing to do with the war. If Barret reckoned he wanted to chuck it and run, all well and good. But regulations did not extend to an inhuman point—

Agnadel came up late that night.

"That new captain is speaking of placing a plane-spotter in the turret," he announced. "I don't think it's very serious. He's freshly back from Russia and a bit testy. No immediate danger. There's opposition from the factory inspector, arguments whether the chateau is *Magazinverwaltung* or *Militärhoheit*. But I have arranged for you to leave. I have permission to send two trucks to Bourges, and you, Barret, can drive one of them. Hankins will be your helper. Dr. Labrosse will have the proper credentials, he promises. The trucks will be in a convoy under military guard, so you will not be questioned on the way." He smiled. "A few thousand francs have helped. At Bourges, you'll leave the trucks at the metal works, presumably to return for them by evening. You'll be given an address. Someone will see that you get over into the Free Zone. Your comrade will be out of the worst danger, liable only to internment. But chances are you will not be arrested, and I am assured that there are ways and

Catherine

means of getting you back to England."

"I'll explain to him, Captain."

"Why not now?" Agnadel sat down on the chair, absent-mindedly reached out for the papers and pictures on a couch. He unfolded the old plans, perused them while Barret was speaking to Hankins. "However did these get in the upstairs library?" he mused. "My mother was gathering them to make an album—"

"If you won't tell him, I will," Hankins was saying. "It has nothing to do with the war. After all, we're fighting to free his bloody country, and he's only doing his duty. If he is a gentleman—"

"Our amiable friend seems most excited," Agnadel said, looking up. "What is the row?"

Hankins blurted out words which the captain could not understand. But he did hear the name of his fiancée.

"What about Miss de Guitres? What's he saying, Barret? I don't quite understand his English, speaks too fast."

"It's awkward to say, Captain, but he is in love with Miss de Guitres, and thinks, in loyalty to you, that you should know it." Barret saw that Agnadel was so sincerely startled that he added, "She has been coming to see us. Didn't want you to be worried about her. You understand, Captain—"

"Oh, perfectly." Agnadel did not turn a hair. "She brought these up, I presume? She was right, it does worry me to have her connected with this. The Germans are very strict, and even a young woman would not be forgiven. Tell your young friend that I appreciate his delicacy—and understand his love. I have loved Miss de Guitres for fifteen years."

Agnadel rose, laid a hand on Hankins' shoulder. "It is a great compliment. Very good."

"But he'd like Miss de Guitres to leave before he does."

"Leave? Why? Agnadel's stern face melted into an amused smile. "Oh, I understand. He believes his love must be returned. Quite naturally. Just like that. Your comrade lacks no presumption, Barret. However, humor him. A man his age in love is not reasonable. And Miss de Guitres, in her solicitude for a wounded man, helpless, in danger, may have been so kind as to be misunderstood. It would be cruel to undeceive him too sharply. Tell him to go, that he has my permission to write to Miss de Guitres as soon as it is safe, and meanwhile to think things over. She is French, he is English, and she is two or three years his senior." Agnadel sighed. "Still, you see how foolish the wisest women can be. Miss de Guitres allowing this young clown to get a crush on her!"

Hankins resumed speaking. He did not understand the words very well, but he was infuriated by Agnadel's loftiness. Barret had to translate. "Captain, he wants your word of honor that you will not seek to keep Miss de Guitres to her promise."

"He wants a great deal, doesn't he? I shall not submit Miss de Guitres to a painful and rather ridiculous scene. If he weren't dependent upon me, I'd have boxed his ears long since." He tried to leave, but the young Englishman stood before the door. "Please—please—Barret, he's mad." Agnadel stepped back as Hankins tried to grasp him. "Very well, tell him I'll have Miss de Guitres herself give him her answer."

He motioned for Hankins to be patient, opened the door and softly summoned Celestin, standing guard on the landing. "Ask Miss de Guitres to come up a moment."

Agnadel resumed his calm expression, lighted a cigarette. His attitude was that of a polite man who faces a rude scene. He remarked, "It is cruel, but necessary." And Barret felt as if he were standing in a bucket of ice. Events had escaped his control. In another few minutes, in this house surrounded by armed enemies, there would be a very interesting domestic drama!

Olympe entered, looked at Agnadel, who smiled apologetically and started to speak, looked at Hankins, at Barret. Then, grave and resolute as Marie-Antoinette in the tumbril, she paced the distance to the lanky young Britisher, took his hand and faced the captain. Hankins placed his arm over her shoulder to protect her.

"Laurent, I—"

Agnadel cut her short with a nod. "I see, I see. Curious." He considered the two. Barret noticed that his lips were as white as the cigarette paper. "Very curious."

"I know you think it's horrible, because of Odet—"

"You have an aunt in Brittany, haven't you, Olympe?" When she nodded, he went on. "I'm sure I can obtain a pass from the German authorities inside twenty-four hours. Your family notary and Mr. Taraud can settle the business matters."

"Captain Agnadel," Hankins held out his hand, "I must—"

"Does he want my hand across his face?" Agnadel asked Barret casually, turning away. Olympe gave a queer little cry and ran to him, calling his name. "What is it, Miss de Guitres?"

"Laurent, I didn't mean to hurt you, I—Laurent—"

The captain looked into her face, and with a sensation of horror Barret knew his words were utterly sincere. "I'm not hurt. Not at all. Certain rivals abolish rivalry. Some wounds are self-cauterizing. I did not say serious, merely curious."

Barret followed him out.

"Might as well come down to my room," Agnadel said. "Caution seems to be abandoned for tonight. Luckily, we have no Germans in the house." In his rooms, he indicated an easy-chair. "Make yourself comfortable. I have another pleasant task in prospect tonight. Taraud is here, in conference with my mother. There has been trouble at the factory of late, slow deliveries, defectives. There is sabotage. There has always been, but the word must have gone around that I was mixed up with the de Gaullists. Sabotage is difficult to detect at once on magnetos. But complaints are beginning to come in, and the inspectors have had my manager on the carpet. Cognac?"

He poured from the same decanter that Barret remembered at the squadron, or its twin.

"I feel oddly light and aimless, Barret. A while ago, my future was mapped out in one direction. You recall that I was thinking of going to England with you. Then my mother, my fiancée and her father came to see me at the hospital. Odet had been killed at Mers-el-Kebir. I could not very well say, 'The British killed him, eh? What a coincidence! I'll be joining the British as soon as I am on my feet.'

"De Guitres senior told me Britain did not like France to have such good ships. Mentioned the Naval Treaty of 1921. Ratio of five-five-three—America, Britain, Japan. France, with a colonial empire as widely scattered as Great Britain's, was relegated to parity with Italy, which owned two sand-lots across the Mediterranean. Germany had crushed us with planes, tanks, manufactured with loans from abroad. Our workmen were worked upon by propaganda. You should see the comparative statistics between Spring, 1940, and this year! Sabotage and all, they're working!"

"Under threat of death," Barret suggested.

"Because they wouldn't work as free men. I saw a possibility of living in a stable world, as a Frenchman, for France. Let Frenchmen learn the organization and discipline of the Germans, and they would be their masters in ten years. Bah, this is theorizing, which I detest! Wait here for me, if you wish; you're as safe as anywhere else for thirty minutes or so." He indicated the ceiling with a lift of the chin. "And you might disturb them."

Barret walked about the rooms, looked at the paintings, the photographs. He saw himself, standing between Parisot and Desgranges, in French uniform, looking very young and sure of everything. He saw Olympe, at ten, with a hoop; at fourteen, with a racket. Then in the *Dames de France's* uniform.

"Must have hit him," he mused. "She's something to lose."

THE distant thundering of guns started, a trumpet sounded near the factory. Barret switched off the lights, lifted the thick curtain. Searchlights stabbed upward, whistles shrilled. But the alert subsided, the nearby guns did

not fire. By a queer phenomenon of mental projection, he was in one of the bombers beating back to England. Away, away, away—it was not always pleasant, and he wondered why he wished himself in that deadly grind. It wasn't logical—but nothing was logical.

Hankins least of all. He had let himself be taken, then had killed to gain freedom to run off into an unknown country, ignorant of its language, without a chance to escape. Hankins, although he never voiced heroic sentiments, was brave. In England, like many another, he would have left behind a sweetheart, a wife. Here, he was behaving like a hare-brained kid. And that rather snobbish, haughty French girl was acting as if she were thirteen years old.

The lights, which he had forgotten to switch back, blazed. "Ah, still here?" Agnadel pushed the door quietly, rested his back upon it. Some of the rigidity was gone from his bearing. His face was human, almost gentle. He took breath, went to the tray, filled a large glass with the fine cognac, drank it like water. "I hear it helps. There must be a reason for drunkards. I'm beginning to understand old Grandet."

"You can't figure on women," Barret started. He thought that Agnadel was feeling the impact at last.

"You can't, can you?" Agnadel wiped his lips with his handkerchief, smiled. "I wish I was the kind that could smash furniture, or shout." He broke into a laugh. "I've just had what Lieutenant Parisot would have called 'a smack that would dehorn a buffalo!' Dehorn, a most appropriate word at this point—"

"Captain, I share your—"

"You share the bottle and the woes, that's a good lad." Agnadel filled the glasses. "See here, Barret, don't start talking like me—not natural. Tonight, you'd have given the clown a good kick in the pants. And what you'd have done downstairs, I don't dare imagine. It was too perfect, too perfect—

"Why not tell you? There are few family secrets nowadays, you know. I went downstairs, and found my mother and Taraud together, with the ledgers and documents and letters. The first thing that Taraud tells me is that the permit for the trucks to Bourges has been called in by the Germans, and that we have to pay a fine. Too many defectives. I have not been, he tells me, bearing down of late. I must give up the management.

"My mother agrees with him. I'm too refined for business. But before I quit, there are two things I must do: First, have some personal friends of mine, German aviators, in for dinner, to impress an inspector. I agree. I know I've gone too easy on the workers the past months. You can't drive people to do work for Germany when you are helping the enemy. Subconscious extension. Oh, yes, I read such books.

"The second thing: I must prevail upon my fiancée to ask her guardians to let loose a serious sum in advance of her dowry, to settle the fine, pay off some bills, without our having to liquidate certain assets. That more or less forced me to explain that I could not do it. Taraud looks at my mother, she looks at him and says, 'He's found out about the Englishman.' And he says, 'You see that it would have been better to settle the matter at once by informing the Germans.'

"'And having me executed!' I tell them. My mother denies that. 'No, Celestin would have taken the whole blame. I'd have promised him to pay his children a good pension, signed notes.' Taraud says, 'The Germans would never have taken the word of the servants against ours.' Pretty, eh?

"My mother then told me I could not break the engagement with Olympe. Not now, when business was so involved. Her father invested five hundred thousand francs with us in 1924. His estate was satisfied with a small interest and allowed the rest to accumulate. It amounts to several million francs, and if her people ask for it in a lump, it will about sink us. Not ruin us, exactly, but force us to borrow heavily elsewhere, with the factory passing out of our control. The Germans have 'bought' stock already, and would probably swallow the rest.

"I balked like a mule, naturally. I will not ask Olympe for a favor. You

believe that is the end? You don't know business. They asked me, as long as I was unwilling to help, to sign away my rights in exchange for a pension paid by the month. I did it. Then, at Taraud's suggestion, my mother asked for my word of honor that if any trouble came with the Germans over what has been going on, I would swear that I was involved alone, to save the factory from being seized. I am her only son, they'd undoubtedly shoot me, but she has to safeguard her old age. I was limp by then, and gave my word of honor.

"NOW, do you know what is going on at this moment? They have sent for Olympe. I am out of the business, our engagement is broken, so it's on a money basis. Olympe is an adult, her signature counts within limits. They will point out to her that her fortune is profitably invested with us—with them, I mean—and that there is no reason to withdraw any of it; that she must ask her guardians to supply the needed sum. She is not to go to Brittany, where her advisers might sway her, but go to Switzerland, for her health. As an inducement, Taraud will guarantee her that by means known to him, having to do with money and bribes, her Englishman will be placed beyond danger of execution, in the Free Zone, and that everything possible will be done to prevent his internment so he can escape to England."

"Can it be done?" Barret asked.

"Very probably. Taraud knows a good many hungry German officials. You'd be amazed at the concessions one can obtain for twenty thousand Swiss francs guaranteed in a Berne bank."

"Olympe will accept, I think."

"Why not? It's a bargain," Agnadel sneered. "Peculiar thing, you know, the bottom didn't really drop out of things for me even then. It was something else, very slight. You know Mariette, that cousin of Catherine, sort of prettier edition? She came in with hot drinks, as usual, saw that there was tension. She broke a cup. My mother told her, 'That's out of your wages.' I wanted to laugh, I wanted to cry. I ended by doing nothing."

"That leaves me," Barret observed dryly. "I didn't want to leave Hankins, afraid he'd do something silly. Am I provided for? There was a scheme—"

"That leaves you, right." Agnadel looked into his glass as in a crystal ball. "You and me. I need a change of scene. I'd like to get away. I'm rather an ass in many ways, Barret, but I can think in terms of action, and if you'll remember, I can fly. The shortest path is the straight line, and these days the most plausible course is the most fantastic. You came by plane. Do you want to go back by plane?"

"You want to join the British?"

"I want to leave France. But no crawling about in ditches, no sleeping in bars. One card, win or lose. It would be impossible for you, it might be feasible for me. Wait—" Agnadel gestured warningly. "Overland, all you risk is capture and prison camp. With me, it will be England or a firing squad within a few hours."

"You're sure Hankins will be all right?"

"I feel no great personal concern, you know. But as he represents a financial investment for Taraud and my mother, he's about as safe as anyone is at this time."

Barret paused, looked at his former chief. Yes, he was energetic, calm, and a fine aviator.

"I'd like to chance it with you, Captain." He touched the other's palm to seal the agreement. "How will it be done?"

"Your part's to let things run and act natural. You'll understand before long. I'm superstitious about talking much in advance." He shook the decanter. "We did a job on this! By the way, if you're available, I invite you to dinner tomorrow night."

CHAPTER X

THE STORM-CLOUDS GATHER

THE following afternoon was spent in preparations.

Olympe de Guitres, perhaps matured by her love for Hankins, had uncovered a fine ability to

drive a bargain. She explained to Barret—under a seal of secrecy so that her "Johnny" would not know of the sordid details, which might humiliate him—that she did not trust Taraud nor Laurent's mother, and had obtained guarantees. She would leave late that afternoon with Madame Agnadel, taking a train for Lyon, in the Free Zone, and would not sign anything until she had seen Hankins safe with her own eyes.

Barret saw that if Hankins survived the war and married this delicately beautiful French girl, he would have a good manager. There was a determined, steely quality in her tone, in her clear eyes.

"I know what you fear, Bobby," she concluded. "That I'll plead with Johnny to stay with me. But I am a Frenchwoman, and I understand duty to one's country. He'd hate me later if I made him soft and cowardly. I'll see that he gets back to England and fights as he should."

Hankins would go as soon as darkness was complete, through the back stairway, the park and the drain. Celestin would surrender him to a guide. After a hike across country, he would be picked up by a man driving a horse cart, taken to a small railroad station, where the German guards were known to be middle-aged and lax. To cover his ignorance of French, he would wear a voluminous bandage around his throat, neatly faked by Dr. Labrosse. On the train, a kindly old lady would befriend him. She would do the talking for him at the final inspection, at Chalon.

Barret went over and over the details with him. He must remember not to exclaim, not to talk. Hankins looked very odd in the purplish French suit with flaring lapels. The shoes provided were too snug, but he said sore feet would give him an expression of pain to match the bandage. The Britisher tried to carry it off casually, but he was nervous. For many hours he would be under strain, in constant danger of discovery and arrest. And arrest would mean a blank wall and a firing party in the courtyard of some provincial station. Of that, Hankins did not speak.

"You see, old chap," he said, "a little frank talk settled things. I must say the chap was very sporting. I'd like to see him. You'll give him my thanks, and all that, won't you?" He swallowed hard, fussed with the contents of the small leather bag he was to tote. "You've been very decent, Bobby. You might have cut it much sooner on your own, and don't you think I don't know."

"Buy me a beer in London," Barret told him, smiling nervously.

"A barrel, old chap. I'll be filthy with the stuff, what with back pay and all, you know." He started to chant, "Roll out the Barret—" and his voice strangled.

At four o'clock, Barret took leave of Olympe, who started to weep and kissed him on both cheeks. The sincerity of that was so plain, so spontaneous, that it broke him down a little. He returned from the archives room fifteen minutes later. Hankins was staring at the pile of trunks.

"Queer, Bobby, how somebody can step into your life and fill it." He sighed. "I'll see her tomorrow night, or never again. Queer. Man at the engine turns his little handle, puff-puff-puff, off we go, eh? Wish we could go together. Cutting straight north, eh? Speaking the lingo, you have a good chance. Don't get sick crossing the Old Ditch."

"Whoever gets back first," Barret said, "has a chore. Must see Mafflet's people."

"Right."

They spoke very little more. At six o'clock, as arranged, Barret had to go downstairs. He rose, looked about him. The weeks he had spent in this place seemed comfortable. He had to drive himself.

"Well—"

They both spoke the word, both stopped. Hankins mangled Barret's fingers in his grip. He opened his lips several times, found nothing to say, shook his head and grinned ruefully. Barret left.

"Some belong to Monsieur Laurent, some were Monsieur Odet's—" Catherine said, indicating civilian garments. "Shirts and ties are over there, towels here—"

Barret decided to bathe and shave. He could at least die clean. He thought of Hankins alone upstairs, waiting for darkness, aching for Olympe. A few feet away, yet he might never see him again. He thought of running up, telling him that he did not blame him for anything. But Hankins knew all that.

Then he thought of Taraud and Madame Agnadel. Both of them collaborated with the Germans, both of them detested working people of their own land. They had reported saboteurs and absentees. Yet, as they had known of Barret's presence in the attic, of Hankins', they had known about the others before, probably. They had not informed the conquerors. Perhaps they even helped the underground workers, through Dr. Labrosse. Perhaps they loved France, a France of their own creation.

There was Olympe, stating that she, as a Frenchwoman, knew that a man must be a patriot. She had contributed to Agnadel's decision to remain in France, because of her brother's death. Yet she would send Hankins back to the British Air Force, he was sure of that.

And yet she would sign away money to be used in manufacturing gadgets for German machines, to fight her lover's people. She would have the income from the investment. In years to come, perhaps that money would educate her children as good little Britishers.

"Cockeyed," Barret grumbled as he dried himself.

THERE were the anonymous German petty officials who took bribes to issue passes. They probably wanted Germany to win the war. But for immediate gain, they were releasing a man who might lead a bomber over their home cities within a few weeks. Greedy as they were, they would be shocked if called traitors. Helping a prisoner of war to escape—what a trifle, when there were so many million men involved! They might even believe themselves swayed by good nature, kindness, humane considerations.

Then there were the pure patriots, humble men like Dubaille, Joseph and their friends, well educated, prosperous men like Labrosse, who risked themselves without hope of personal gain. They would receive no reward, no medals after the war. Selfless heroes not cast in heroic molds. Dubaille was gross, obviously loved the bottle, Joseph undoubtedly was a hard man on his family, Dr. Labrosse had an eye for ankles and curves, despite his profession and his years. And there were the women connected with those men, worried, fearful, reluctant, yet resigned. Any morning, some neighbor might drop in and say, "Your husband was among the lot shot this morning."

"Cockeyed and screwy," Barret mused. "But the craziest notion is what we'll try to get away with. It's been done, of course, but—"

Agnadel intended to escape in a German plane, evidently, as there were no other planes available. Yes, it had been done. Two French kids, sixteen or seventeen years old, had stolen a German training machine and flown across part of France and the Channel, through British as well as German patrols. Two other kids had assembled a plane in a barn, with miscellaneous parts, got across. Barret had heard of a British officer taking a German pursuit ship from a field in Holland and getting home safely. It could be done.

Some people could fall from the roof of a six-story house and walk off uninjured. It had happened. But in the majority of falls, the faller was killed or maimed.

"Am I jittery," he breathed, "am I jittery!"

His brain was feverish, his bowels quivered, he felt as if quicksilver were running in his veins. He was so nervous, so scared, that he felt as if he were standing outside of his body, watching it quiver. Yet his hands seemed to have acquired an extraordinary steadiness. He shaved without scratching himself. He selected a blue shirt, a conservative necktie, a navy blue suit. Odet's shoes fitted him well—dead man's shoes.

Could someone have made off with a machine in his own unit in France, in England? Yes, on rare occasions, by a combination of circumstances, a series

of coincidences. On one occasion, he had found two little kids in the cockpit of his plane, on an army field guarded by sentries, swarming with pilots, mechanics and riggers. Human beings were faulty, could not be vigilant at all times. But the Germans were in a conquered land, must be watching with care.

Barret eyed the decanter, which had been refilled. He poured out a large dose, poured four-fifths of it back. Wouldn't do to be half-tight, if anything broke. He looked at himself in a mirror. He needed a haircut, but otherwise looked rather well. Worry or not, he had gained some weight during his confinement in the attic. He took another small nip.

"General anesthetic," he excused himself.

Agnadel came in. He declared himself satisfied with Barret's appearance. "Our guests are on the way. Remember we have nothing to worry about until the actual attempt." He smiled. "At least, you haven't. You're not harboring a fugitive. Just let things go and don't worry."

He sat down and old Celestin came in, lathered him, shaved him with straight razors. He had a set of four, to avoid wasting his master's time stropping. He trimmed Barret's hair with a few snips and strokes.

"You know what to do? You are sure that Dr. Labrosse understood just what was needed?" Agnadel asked him.

"Monsieur Laurent need not worry."

AT SEVEN-thirty, they went down to the ground floor. The guests were arriving. Taraud brought those who were to be impressed; members of the *Kontrollkommission*, one a sort of colossus, Herr Rugger-Basel, the other a slight, youngish secretary. Agnadel had invited those who were to impress them, *Major* Leiningen, *Oberleutnant* Von Krieblow, *Leutnant* Hanseen. The *Kapitan* in charge of the anti-aircraft group, Wiesent, also came.

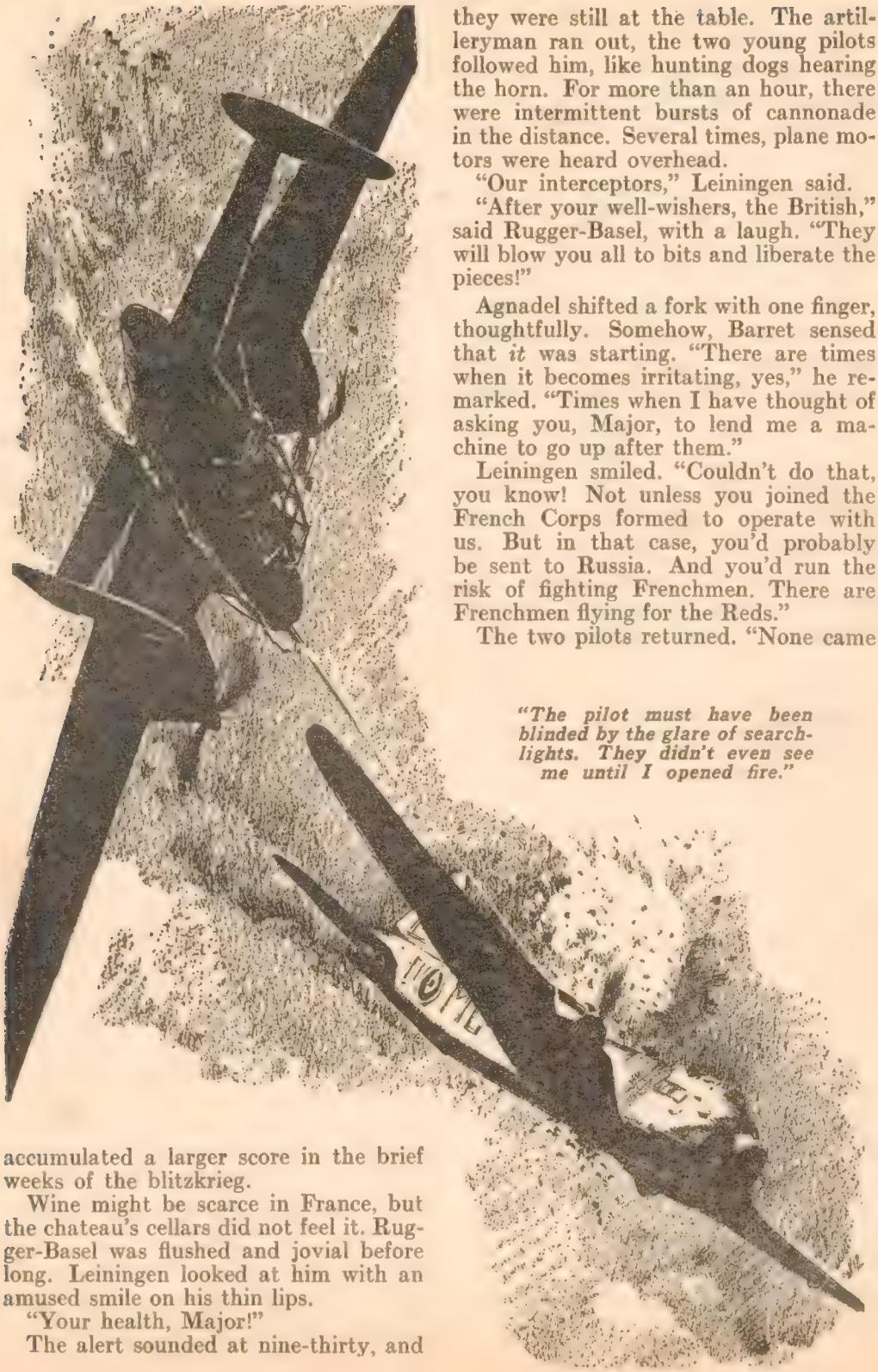
Agnadel introduced Barret as "a colleague of the war, Lieutenant Barret." There was no need for an alias. And the Germans would not suspect that a man brought to meet them so casually was not reported to the proper authorities. It was not the first time since the war had started that Barret was to dine in the company of Germans. He had sat next to them in North African hotels and in Lisbon. With the exception of the civilian controller, Rugger-Basel, who looked like the Teuton brute of propaganda posters, these fellows did not appear sinister or formidable.

Major Leiningen was thin, tall, red-haired, in his late thirties. Barret discovered that Agnadel had known him for six or seven years before the war. Von Krieblow and Hanssen were tall, clean-cut, handsome lads not much more than twenty, *Hauptmann* Wiesent, whose voice Barret had heard through a pile of sheets, was short and dark as a Sicilian.

There were exclamations of concern and regret that the ladies would not be present. Von Krieblow had brought some music he had promised Miss de Guitres. Agnadel assured them that he would do his best to make this an enjoyable bachelor dinner. He spoke German fluently enough, but French was in general use. All of the Germans knew it to some extent.

The Agnadels had their own farms, were comparatively wealthy, on good terms with the invaders. The dinner compared well with the one Barret had attended before. Barret found time to be amused by the visible distinctions made. The civilian commissioners were lower than the flyers, about on a level with the captain who, while nominally in the Air Force, belonged to anti-aircraft artillery.

The two young pilots were veterans. Von Krieblow, for instance, had campaigned in Poland, in Norway, in France, over the Channel, in Libya, in Russia. He wore two rows of decorations. Hanssen was a mild-mannered fellow, with a shy, boyish glance, and did not talk much. Their chief, Leiningen, was manifestly proud of them, and they liked and respected him. Toward Agnadel they directed something of the same admiration. The Frenchman was an older man, a gallant flyer, who had done well at their game. Very few Frenchmen had



"The pilot must have been blinded by the glare of searchlights. They didn't even see me until I opened fire."

accumulated a larger score in the brief weeks of the blitzkrieg.

Wine might be scarce in France, but the chateau's cellars did not feel it. Rugger-Basel was flushed and jovial before long. Leiningen looked at him with an amused smile on his thin lips.

"Your health, Major!"

The alert sounded at nine-thirty, and they were still at the table. The artilleryman ran out, the two young pilots followed him, like hunting dogs hearing the horn. For more than an hour, there were intermittent bursts of cannonade in the distance. Several times, plane motors were heard overhead.

"Our interceptors," Leiningen said.

"After your well-wishers, the British," said Rugger-Basel, with a laugh. "They will blow you all to bits and liberate the pieces!"

Agnadel shifted a fork with one finger, thoughtfully. Somehow, Barret sensed that *it* was starting. "There are times when it becomes irritating, yes," he remarked. "Times when I have thought of asking you, Major, to lend me a machine to go up after them."

Leiningen smiled. "Couldn't do that, you know! Not unless you joined the French Corps formed to operate with us. But in that case, you'd probably be sent to Russia. And you'd run the risk of fighting Frenchmen. There are Frenchmen flying for the Reds."

The two pilots returned. "None came

this way," Von Krieblow said. "I was ready to swear at my luck—my watch's at four! Do you know, I've been on this three months—interception—and haven't had a chance to fire my guns? Hanssen's the lucky lad—"

"He brought down the bomber, a few weeks ago," Leiningen stated. "Come, Karl, tell us about it—"

Hanssen drained a glass, refilled immediately by Celestin.

"Nothing much to it, Major. You've seen the report."

"But I haven't," Barret put in, "and I used to be in Pursuit."

"By day? It's very different." Hanssen looked at the tablecloth thoughtfully. "I felt sorry for the poor beggars. They'd been hit already, one engine was dead. The pilot must have been blinded by searchlights. Had a lot to do just to fly. They didn't even see me until I fired. Got a burst right in the middle. They dove and I lost them. But one of their gunners turned loose at nothing. I dove for the tracers from one side. That was all. My gunner did not have to fire a round."

"What plane do you use?"

"Messerschmitt 110," Hanssen said, after consulting his chief with a glance. He shrugged. "I went to school in England for two years. So I drove over to Lantes to see the Englishmen taken. Sergeants, both. Nice fellows. I understand the others escaped." Hanssen smiled. "I rather hope they did. Fight, kill or die, very well. Prison, no." He appeared to feel abashed at his long speech, addressed Barret. "What did you fly?"

"Morane, Bloch, Curtiss."

This led to a discussion of various machines, French, British, American, German; comparisons and, of course, arguments. The wine bottles circulated, sketches were drawn on the cloth with knife-points and pencils. The explanations became involved in the confusion of languages. "What is the French for *Schwungkraftanlasser*, Captain? *Ja, ja, démarreur?*" Barret lost track of the controversy over an inertia-type starter, for Celestin, standing behind Leiningen, has casually touched his nose and smiled. Pilot Officer Hankins was on his way!

The party scattered in the salons; Taraud and his guests kept together. Captain Wiesent returned for a liqueur, then sent in his lieutenant, whose cousin lived in Hamburg and knew Hanssen's people. Von Krieblow gravitated to the piano, started to play, seriously at first, then recent popular songs. He sang a long, mournful ditty which sent his comrades into convulsed laughter.

The anti-aircraft artilleryman clung to Barret's shoulder and tried to explain it in his halting French, between guffaws. "Very droll, eh? Ha-ha, comic." It seemed that the song was a parody on an old German ballad concerning two lost Italian children, only now it was two hundred thousand Italians who wanted to go home. The lieutenant then labored to make clear an old joke about the Italian pursuit ship that could be flown in reverse.

The three young Germans became somewhat rowdy. Leiningen, speaking to Agnadel, smiled indulgently. "They're not on call until four o'clock and probably'll just have to stand by. The bombers don't come that late—daylight'd catch them in Normandy." Barret almost liked him, almost forget he was an enemy. His manner was so correct, he appeared so kindly. Then Leiningen resumed speaking, in the same affable voice. "You understand, Captain, of course—we shall probably have to resume punishment on a large scale, *Massenbestrafung*. Your police cooperated with us very well for a while. But we cannot make individual investigations to find the guilty. We lack the men, we lack the time."

Rugger-Basel stumbled by, flanked by Taraud and his secretary, like an ocean liner between tugs. He bowed to Leiningen, shook hands damply, hiccuped, saluted a picture of Marshal Petain, hung up like an icon on the wall, and was warped out of the room, to stumble on as far as a couch. The major's eyes pleated at the corner, he smiled with disdain. "We were saying, Captain?"

"About mass punishment—"

"Yes. We must resume in its old

strength the system of fines on nearby localities. Those British aviators, for instance, did not vanish into thin air. We know within a few kilometers where they dropped. A half-millon francs assessment for the nearest village would have produced them."

"Perhaps," Agnadel admitted.

AT one o'clock, Celestin brought more bottles, put platters of cold meats on the table. Von Krieblow was balancing a chair on his chin. Hanssen called Barret over to show him a wrestling trick. The two were having a fine time; they were the friendliest of killers.

"It's Japanese. Tricky, eh?"

Leiningen had come near to watch. He was smiling. The corded silver braid on his yellow shoulder-straps glistened. "Excellent, famous! Yes, the Japanese have the right idea—until you can strike, a smile, a bow. Dissimulation is a powerful weapon. Chivalry, Captain? A word to get admiration, not victory. A smile and a bow! Then crack! You understand me, Captain? Famous wine, this! Lieutenant"—he addressed Barret—"would you care to drive out to the field with us?"

"I'd be happy to, Major."

"You see, Captain, what I was saying?" Leiningen laughed. "I win. It is so, gentlemen, it is so! Once an aviator, always an aviator. A chance to hear motors, to smell petrol! To share the excitement, even so little. Eh-eh, there are things we shall miss when all this is over."

Barret considered Agnadel with new admiration. Major Leiningen was convinced that the invitation to the field was his own idea. Just how had Agnadel managed that? Barret had never suspected him of being diplomatic, wily. Yet, in all friendliness, he was getting point after point, unhurriedly.

Von Krieblow was at the piano again, banging out a burlesque march, shouting, "Now, the Air Marshal comes! Chest in, belly out, tramp, tramp, behold the mighty Herman!" while Hanssen waddled about, beaming right and left at imaginary troops, snapping up his hand. The artillerist was shedding tears of mirth. The major smiled and turned his back on the sacrilegious scene.

CHAPTER XI

THE STORM BREAKS

WHEN the major gave the signal for departure, the younger officers reacted to the slight change in his voice. They staightened, adjusted the collars of their tunics. They did not appear tipsy.

"It's late," Agnadel suggested. "We are former soldiers, aviators, Major, and we understand what service is. If it means the least inconvenience to take us along, we hold you to your invitation for another day. You won your point; my young colleague could not resist being near planes again and—"

Leiningen looked at his watch, and for an interminable second Barret feared his friend had carried his bluff too far. There could be no other day. Rugger-Basel would certainly inquire about the unknown civilian who had appeared at the Agnadels' table.

"You don't get out of it that easily," the German stated at last. "These young fellows will be on duty but an hour, then we shall all breakfast together, the classic onion soup, eh? After that, we can find room for you or I shall have you brought back here."

"At your orders, Major. Stirrup cup?"

"Thank you, yes—" Leiningen turned to take a glass from the tray Celestin held at his elbow. "What about you young roosters? Feel able for one more drink?"

"A full tank and a full pilot," Von Krieblow said, laughing. The artillery lieutenant, about to leave, returned for his glass. The six stood silent a moment, until the major spoke: "So that we can all be sincere in our hearts—" he smiled at the two Frenchmen knowingly—"let this last drink be a silent toast to our hearts' dearest desire."

At the bottom of the stoop the artilleryman took leave with salutes and handshakes. The aviators' chauffeur had brought the big car, stood yawning, stretching. Von Krieblow climbed in at

his side, Agnadel, Leiningen and Barret took the rear seat, Hanssen occupied a folding seat. Cigarettes were lighted, the chauffeur got his order. Despite the dimmed lights, he started out very fast, hurtled through the gateway, swung left. Barret heard the iron grills slam shut, and the road opened before him.

He was dazed by the rush of air after his long confinement, kept awake with an effort. He wished to be ready if Agnadel needed him. But everything was peaceful, conversation loud and brisk. At intervals they rolled by a post, flashed before a rigid sentry. Then Barret recognized the narrow-gauge railway he had seen. Joseph's farm was not far away. He thought that Hankins might be very near, then realized that several hours had passed, that the Englishman must be on the train, with the old lady.

From time to time, his knee came in contact with that of young Hanssen, who had shot the bomber down and killed Mafflet. That was an episode he could not relate to the poor chap's family!

He lurched forward as the chauffeur put on the brakes and stopped. Von Krieblow rose as if to get out of the car, the major questioned him in German, made some gruff remark. The car went on again. From then on, the three officers spoke very little, seemed nervous and surly. Barret peered into the fading stars for a possible plane. Was there danger, did they fear anything?

A few minutes later, when the car halted before the gate in a barbed wire fence, the major lost his temper and shouted at the guards. The car went on, slid to a complete stop at last before a long, low plank structure. The officers piled out, Leiningen turned for a brief apology to Agnadel, and they hurried into the building.

"We have at least ten minutes," Agnadel announced quietly.

Barret understood and grinned.

The air was cool and moist, dawn was very near. He could see little of the field receding into the darkness. The foliage of trees stood out against the sky. A few hundred yards away, the roar of engines swelled and dwindled at intervals.

"Warming up," Agnadel said. "Let's go on."

He led the way into the building. It was used as offices and headquarters, not as a residence. The flyers had rooms in a nearby village, the soldiers were quartered in barracks beyond the camouflaged hangars. A sentry saluted them in the corridor. There was a lighted room on the right, telephone switchboard and radio apparatus. There were two non-coms there, wearing headgears. One was sketching on a pad, the other was reading a magazine.

"Major Leiningen?" Agnadel said.

ONE of them looked up, pointed. They came to another door, another room. Benches along the walls, a few pictures tacked up, a long table on which a young lieutenant was writing a letter. He smiled as he looked up, continued. Agnadel casually reached out, picked up two packs from a bench. He handed them to Barret without a word. They backed out, and ran into two young men in flying suits, who flattened against the partition to let them pass. Barret felt the cold sweat break out on his face.

There was a small car outside, chugging quietly. The driver was talking to the sentry, smoking a cigarette. Agnadel took a bicycle from a rack, straddled it. "Get on. In front."

The driver and the sentry watched them, said nothing. Then they went on talking. One of them laughed.

Barret hoisted himself on the handlebars, with the packs. Any moment the sentry would turn and question them, that was sure. They started off, Agnadel pedaling slowly, weaving from side to side.

"The driver brought in those pilots we met," Agnadel commented casually. "He's waiting for the others. Our friends. Nothing to worry about from him."

The light was breaking; a pinkish mist floated over the field. Several men emerged from this fog, walking in step, humming. They looked at the two men on the bicycle, but did not stop. They were mechanics, riggers, carried no visible weapons.

"Five minutes gone," Agnadel announced.

They passed another group—isolated men. One or two halted, turned. No one called or tried to stop them. This was natural. The whole field was enclosed in barbed wire, guarded by armed soldiers. People who wanted secrecy did not climb two on a bicycle. Barret peered back, could not distinguish the building.

"Go faster," he urged.

"Unwise," Agnadel retorted.

The elongated silhouettes of the planes emerged from the mist. The captain pedaled deliberately. There were several men around one machine, the other seemed unguarded. Agnadel headed for it. Just as he reached it, a man walked away, toward the other plane. Another man slid to the ground. He wore flying togs. Everything was so calm, so normal, that Barret felt he was dreaming.

Agnadel laid the bicycle on the ground. The man came nearer. He probably was the non-com who was to handle the stern machine gun. He was bareheaded, his face was white, his close-cropped hair looked like a skull-cap.

"Lieutenant Von Krieblow's plane?" Agnadel asked him.

"Yes."

"All right," the captain addressed Barret, "we're here. Put them down. We wait."

With a deliberation that tortured Barret, the captain ignored the non-com, started to fiddle with the gear he had brought. To Barret's bewilderment—but as Agnadel had planned—the soldier started to laugh, circled about. "No, no—this way—so—" He was amused, friendly. Why not? These men must be a bit tipsy to come two on a bike; they knew his lieutenant, had been allowed on the field.

He straightened up to answer a hail from the other plane, walked away a few steps, to be heard above the uproar, shouted the same words three or four times. He returned, looked at Barret, grinned, gestured. Maybe Barret wanted to dress up? He was as willing as any man to enter into the spirit of a joke, he exclaimed in German, in French. And he worried as little about a pursuit plane being stolen as an elephant driver would worry about his charge being kidnapped. A man cannot step casually into a war plane and take off. He has to be trained for it. And he had a half-dozen mates within two hundred feet.

Agnadel pointed at the wheels, spoke in German. The gunner squatted to see better. The captain lifted his arm and swung. The non-com dropped to all fours, flattened out quietly.

"Up," Agnadel ordered. Barret climbed in, the captain followed, closed the transparent canopy. Not a hundred yards away, quite visible by now, Ger-

The German gunner squatted beside the plane's wheel to see better and Agnadel lifted his arm and swung.

mans stood about the other machine. Barret was at the rear of the cockpit, Agnadel occupied the pilot's seat. His hands touched the controls one after another, with that same horrible deliberation. Barret wanted to scream for him to hurry.

THE idling engines leaped into full roar. The plane started forward, swerved sharply, straightened. Barret looked over at the Germans. They had turned, stood still. Then several of them ran. He swung the machine gun to bear on them. The plane left the ground and they vanished as if dropping down a pit.

Barret could feel Agnadel "fighting" the machine. So far as he knew, his chief had not flown in two years and had never handled a German plane. Very soon, however, he knew that the Frenchman would manage very well. As an afterthought, he plugged in.

". . . Unpleasant without lights," Agnadel's quiet voice reached him. He had forgotten nothing, and had not imagined that Barret would. "I worried about the fence and—ah—thank you, gentlemen—"

Far below, beams of light stabbed horizontally, living, glaring tunnels through the mist. A pair of them swung up jerkily, brushed back and forth, groping. An excited voice started to bark in German on the radio.

Barret felt the plane sway, then it banked and plunged toward that bright patch. Agnadel was diving for the remaining Messerschmitt. The machine vibrated as he opened fire. He missed on the first run, was on the mark on the next. The ship disintegrated and took fire under the stream of small shells and bullets. Barret had believed the first burst intended as a warning to the men to clear off, but knew he was mistaken when the captain gunned a small car scuttling across the field. Followed the familiar sensation of pressure as the plane lifted briskly.

"I believe the radio controls are yours, Barret," Agnadel said. "Switch off that chattering, we know all they have to say." He flew over that field twice more, swooped low over the blazing wreck. "Getting the hang of this. Ah, we'd better leave. The machine guns have started! Going up. Nothing to worry about from here for ten or fifteen minutes. I wonder if our friends were in that car. Sorry for Leiningen. *Pour un boche, c'est un chic type.*"

There was a compass-indicator before Barret; he watched it with surprise. "Which way are we going, Captain?"

"We have petrol to spare," Agnadel explained. "All their planes up between here and the coast will be looking for us inside the next hour. So we shall have a short promenade in another direction." In another moment, he suggested, as when he had led men into action, "Oxygen."

The field had vanished under the swathing mist. Day had come above. The entire world was suffused with fresh light, golden-backed clouds dragged gray-blue bellies over the crests of trees. Automatically, Barret had resumed the restless, parrot-like craning of the neck which is the lot of military flyers.

"Switch them on a bit—"

"Yes, Captain."

"All right. Off." Agnadel went on, "They're looking for us. But I think we're a bit higher than they expect. Lost in the clouds. Poetic expression, eh?" He was silent for some time. "Fine machine, this. Not well-finished according to our old standards, but everything compact and practical. Made for use. They have better ones. This is the same type that we fought during the war." He laughed softly. "I mean my war. You probably met the new stuff, FW's and so on."

"Planes in sight, Captain. Three. About a thousand meters below."

"Have they seen us?"

"I think so—No, they're veering south."

"Patrol from Reims. You're not saying much, Barret."

"Nothing to say, Captain. Except that you carried it off like an artist, beginning to end."

"Why not? Logically, nothing could go wrong, as I had all the advance information. I have studied their machines, their system. Without planning anything, as a military aviator." He

paused. "They seemed stupid, but they were not. Most of those men knew me by sight, had seen me with Major Leiningen and with higher officers. And there is something that most men fear more than a gun, a sword, poison—something that worked for us—"

"Yes, Captain?"

"RIDICULE. There are rules and regulations, you know, and not one of those who saw us really feared a reprimand from an officer. But they were afraid of seeming too zealous, too suspicious. If that non-com had drawn the pistol he doubtless carried and ordered us to leave the packs and stand aside with our hands up, Von Krieblow could not have punished him. But he could have called him a damn fool, an officious ass. Ridicule kills. Do you agree with me, Barret?"

"Oh, certainly, Captain."

"Nine thousand six hundred meters. Functions well." Agnadel resumed, "You agree with me. So you know that I have been dead for more than twenty-four hours. Agree?"

"Dead? I don't understand you, Captain." But Barret understood him very well, and found himself hoping for hostile planes. Agnadel was stubborn and, once started talking, would continue.

"That English clown, what does he do in ordinary times?"

"He was in school, Captain."

"In school? Ah, yes. But his people?"

"I don't know, Captain."

"Did you ever trust in anyone completely, Barret?"

"I suppose so, Captain."

"And what happened?"

"You mean, a girl, a woman, Captain? Well, I was engaged, in America. When I went back for a while, last year, she had married."

"Odd you never told us."

"You mean told Parisot and the rest? Why?" Barret had invented a heartbreak and found himself involved.

"Think we'll go down a bit and look around."

The plane hurtled along a few hundred feet above the earth for some kilometers, then Agnadel took it up again. Not a shot had been fired from below. The compass-indicator shifted from north-east to north-west. The Belgian plains were below.

"Odd how integrated an individual is with his surroundings," Agnadel mused, flying over a billowing sea of clouds. "Like dominoes stood in a row. The first one knocked down brings the lot down. I am not even the first domino. Your English friend may be. I make a decision, for personal reasons. As a result, my mother will be questioned, at least. Taraud certainly will have to explain why you were there and he said nothing.

HIT THE DECK— ACTION AHEAD!

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December ARGOSY **now on sale**

Leiningen will know that the last drinks were doped, and by Celestin. So Celestin will have to hide, has fled by this time. No need to worry about him. With his whiskers shaved, he can pass for the peasant he really is.

"You interested in human nature, Barret? I wasn't and it was my mistake. I might have foreseen what happened, done something to prevent it. Curious story about Celestin. I told him what was expected, told him that he would have to flee, gave him or tried to give him a few thousand francs I had in cash and a note for more. He was very offended. He did not want to be paid for doing something against the boche. I told him it would help take care of his family, his kids.

"He told me they were well taken care of, that he owned two farms outright and held interests in two others. He was no pauper. And, as he spoke, he realized that I would understand something. One of the farms he mentioned is worth somewhat more than the total of his wages since he has been with us! And he said simply, 'My position here has certain legitimate prerogatives.' This old chap had bested my mother and Taraud through the years. A genius. Yet he risks death for his national ideals."

"I was thinking something like it yesterday, Captain."

"Thought is a poison, at times. People have died of it." Agnadel chuckled at his rare humor. "You'll see some amazing things in the future, if you live, Barret. France has been put to the sword, is prostrate and bleeding. I am beginning to think that she will be liberated. Then, unless Frenchmen change, there will be new suffering, sharper, worse, because ignoble.

"I have been speaking with Dr. Labrosse. I thought I would find him a de Gaullist. He is not. He claims, which I can't control, that de Gaulle is for Blum and the Popular Front. He is not on speaking terms with a number of men who are engaged in hidden resistance to the Germans. He believes in a militant government, say with Weygand. I understand that many of the workmen are resisting under orders of their party, that they are Communists. The peasants detest Communism. Celestin is a Radical-Socialist."

HE fell silent, because he had work to do, avoiding a formation of planes that appeared ahead of them. He rose, they rose. For many minutes, he played a game of hide-and-seek with them through the clouds. Barret switched on the radio. He could understand very little, but Agnadel apparently derived help from the broadcast. At last, the captain gestured, resumed talking.

"We've lost them. Barret—"

"Yes, Captain?"

"You're the only person I am in debt to, you know."

"How's that?"

"You saved my life once. Whether it was for my good or not, I don't know. But your intentions were good."

"There was little deliberate intent, Captain."

"Nevertheless, I could not turn you down when you asked my help. You had the decency not to mention it, but I owed you something. If I get you back to England safely, will that compensate?"

Barret laughed. "Oh, quite, Captain."

"That is all you wish from me?"

"What more could I wish?"

"Very well. Will you give me your word to act on my suggestions from now on, without protest or argument of any kind?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Can you get the British frequency on the radio?"

"Yes."

"Do so."

Barret obeyed. When he heard the familiar calls, a queer phenomenon happened. Tears flowed down his face, he sniffled. He had never heard anything as melodious, as thrilling, as those exchanges of banal words and coded signals. Agnadel came down, and Barret saw the gray-green spread of the sea below them.

"Single M ten—" Barret heard, and indications followed.

"Talk to them," Agnadel ordered brusquely.

Barret did. He had not sighted the

British machines as yet. He reported the reason for their presence. "Awaiting instructions on permitted course," he concluded.

"Did you say Barret?" the radio inquired.

"I did. Flying Officer Barret."

"With one T?"

"With one T."

"This is Kirk, Bobby. Two T's is here."

"Very much here, Bobby!" chimed in Barrett with two T's. "Heard you'd packed up or that Jerry'd got you."

"Just one of those idle rumors, Two T's!"

Nothing surprising in the fact that members of his old squadron should be on the job here. But he felt immensely elated.

"Look here, put down your wheels. Must make sure we have the right chaps," Kirk said. Agnadel complied when Barret translated. Thirty seconds later, a streamlined craft was floating alongside a few yards to the right, a Spitfire. Kirk waved one hand, held up a thumb. "Who's your chauffeur, Bobby?"

"French captain."

"I'LL pop ahead, you follow me. The others are behind you—proper escort. I'll chat with my influential friends at home—" He started to talk to the base, assured them that there was no mistake, that Barret was returning with a Messerschmitt. If the anti-aircraft would please refrain from shooting, the favor would be appreciated.

"You'll be sensational, Bobby," remarked Kirk. "Good old super-Yank."

"Barret," Agnadel said suddenly, "you remember what we agreed. Do as I say, without delay or protest."

"Yes, Captain. But you—"

Barret broke off. There was nothing much for Agnadel to do now save fly in meekly. There was one Spitfire ahead and two riding high on their tail. The coast was in sight.

"One of our Hurricanes got him over the Channel . . . Hated to—but we couldn't let the plane go."

They soared low over ground very familiar to Barret.

"All right, Barret. Tell your friend to drop down."

Agnadel was already headed for the field spread below them.

"Barret, I want to spare you a parachute jump. So get clear of your gear. As soon as I touch, leap out and run."

"Captain, I—"

"Do as I say, or I swear I'll drive into one of the hangars!"

"I say, Kirk! I say—"

"Easy does it, Bobby. French isn't a dead language."

The wheels were touching the ground, the plane started to roll. Agnadel turned to Barret and gestured imperiously. Barret unbuckled himself, crept through, opened the canopy. In another second, he was standing on the wing, and the grassy stretch unrolled a few feet below him, still too fast for safety. Planes, trees, knots of men, a gasoline truck, flashed by, slower and slower.

"Jump," Agnadel gestured.

Barret obeyed, landed on his toes, snapped backward and rolled over. He scrambled to his hands and knees, stared after the Messerschmitt. Agnadel had put on maximum force, but he had only a short stretch before him. He rose almost straight up, cleared trees by the proverbial half-inch. Barret rose and limped about, craning his neck.

Kirk and the others were diving down. Barret saw a warning burst, tracers passing very near Agnadel's machine. The Frenchman climbed as if he wanted to smash into the Spitfire, and the other pilot dodged, slid to one side hastily. Agnadel looped, followed, and darted not ten feet above the other. Barret gritted his teeth. He already imagined the streaks of fire—and one of his friends killed by another.

Agnadel started to climb. The others checked their dives, swung to follow him. Then the Frenchman headed southwest, dropped like a stone, and vanished, skimming the trees and roofs.

"We got him over the Channel," a lean Hurricane pilot told Barret that evening. "Hated to, you know, but we couldn't let the plane go. I noticed the same thing that Kirk mentioned—he wanted to shoot and could not bring himself to."

Kirk nodded.

"And a good thing for me. He was quite a lad, had me in a cold sweat."

"Wonder what he really intended to do," the other resumed. "Have you any idea, Barret?"

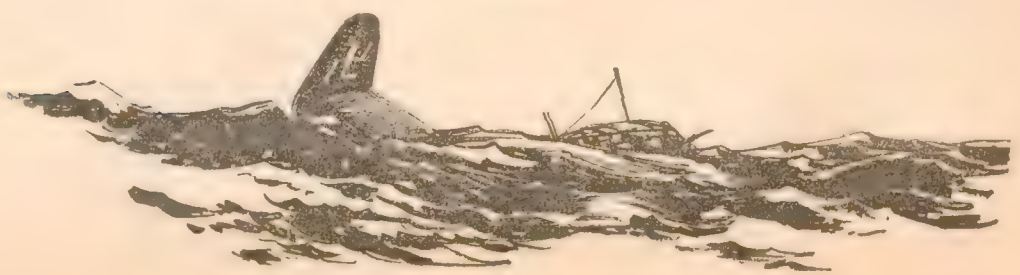
Barret shook his head and had another drink.

What had Agnadel intended to do? Avenge himself by dropping an Englishman? Had he realized the futility of the plan after it was too late? Had he wanted, his debt paid to a friend, to go back and face the music, to lighten the consequences for others?

Then he thought of the simplest solution: Stripped of his beliefs one by one, losing faith in Olympe, in his mother, in himself, he had intended to do just what he had done—find death somewhere in the sky. Swift, clean death. He had been sick in mind, like many others in France; baffled, puzzled, ashamed. He had been unable to believe in the future. His soul had died when he had collaborated with the Germans. Olympe had destroyed his pride. The British had killed nothing but his body.

Meanwhile, he, Barret, was alive, and there was a war to wage and win.

The End



MADE IN AMERICA

The fugitive's eyes froze in their sockets, his gaze riveted upon the ring on the driver's right hand.

By
MAURICE BEAM

ILLUSTRATED
BY
FRANK KRAMER

HE crossed into Oklahoma at four-thirty in the morning, only an hour behind his timetable. At five minutes to five he came to the haystack. He burrowed down into the hay, making a thorough job of it, so that when dawn broke he was safe inside a snug, warm warren.

Lying in his nest, he ate sparingly, a soldier ration, having carefully computed each partaking of his four-day food supply. Afterward he slept, efficiently, as he had learned to sleep when and where he could.

Five years of training had perfected him in this sort of furtive maneuvering. The Luftwaffe had, in fact, taught him nearly all he knew and what it had not taught him he had learned in the Hitler schools. The rest of what he had learned he had all but forgotten.

When evening came, he emerged from the haystack and went on.

It was not novel, this being within enemy country. He had been in Poland and in the Balkans; he had been in Greece; he had helped take Crete. Then he had gone to Africa, where he was

captured. He had been in the midwestern prison camp here in America for eight months.

Now that he had escaped, he was neither excited nor tense. He had made his plans unhurriedly, with the conviction that American civilians would not be hard to elude for one who had been trained to elude the stubborn Poles, the canny guerrillas of Jugoslavia, the starving fanatics of Greece, to say nothing of the perfidious foes one met in the skies.

He had mapped a series of military objectives, the first of which was some forty miles away. It was a railway. In Oklahoma, the almanac said, population was not dense. There were many war industries, but these were concentrated in the cities, so that there was a labor shortage in the smaller towns; these now housed mostly old men and women, the young people having gone to the cities. Therefore, he would avoid all but the little towns should he find it necessary to replenish his food supply.

Besides almanacs, he had studied newspapers and magazines and even schoolbooks on American history and so he had learned the customs of the people of the United States. He had learned there was no peasant class, that farmers here belonged to the same stratum of society as did merchants and bankers—that in fact there were no classes.

He could hardly believe such nonsense, but he had learned it thoroughly. The formula was simple. Foolish as it was, one treated all Americans alike whether they were barefoot or in limousines, whether they were really alike or not. One laughed at their jokes, knowing that they joked about everything.

Moving through the night, he made a forced march of about twenty miles. The next night, it was the same. He was like a shadow. No human being saw him and none knew of his cunning advance.

With daylight he became invisible, the first day in a culvert, the second in an open field where by lacing together the tops of hay stalks he formed a roof which kept off the sun. Each day he slept soundly.

SAT about the middle of the third night of his march, he came to the railway. Breasting through tall grass on the top of a narrow plateau, he suddenly saw the train far to the east and below him. It came crawling across the land like a glowworm. In a moment he heard its eerie whistle. From the railroad schedule which he carried in his pocket he knew this train. It was the Arapahoe, crack transcontinental flyer. It would touch at the city on the Mexican border before continuing on to the coast.

That border city was his secondary objective. From it he could enter the mountain reaches of northern Mexico. Thence he would make his way by slow stages to a seaport.

When the sun rose he was in the wide, shallow valley through which the railroad ran. Dressed in a worn, unmatching suit, a blue shirt open at the throat, scuffed shoes and a sagging felt hat he appeared as he wanted to appear—a nondescript rural American. There was nothing of the military about his longish blond hair, nor about the slight arch he allowed to form in his flat back, nor about the limp he affected. The limp was for the purpose of evading questions about his draft classification and to arouse sympathy. Americans were sentimentalists.

With evening, he entered the railroad yards at the outskirts of a town a few miles from where he had seen the train. The Arapahoe had made a brief stop here. It would do so again tonight.

When it did, he was waiting a hundred yards down-track from the tiny station. A lone passenger descended from a coach midway down the length of the train. The locomotive bell clanged and the giant drive-wheels spun. As the train moved he sprang from the darkness of a sheltering freight-car on an adjoining track. Nimbly he caught the rungs of an iron ladder and climbed. On the oil tender behind the engine he flung himself flat. The Arapahoe picked up speed quickly. Within minutes, he judged, it was moving at one hundred kilometers an hour.

Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico. When morning dawned he was ready as the

train made its first daylight stop. He slid from the tender as the locomotive slowed, far down in the yards, in what appeared to be a good-sized town. He threaded his way across a maze of switch tracks and came to a road. The road led directly to a highway. Boldly now, he started to walk. It was not many miles to the border city. Today, tomorrow — by evening tomorrow he would arrive. . . . Hitchhiking. That was the American word for this. It was easy to travel in America. No one asked for permits, passports or identification papers. No one questioned anyone else. Even criminals, he had read, were treated with childish, sentimental kindness.

A car passed him, and presently another. Next a truck loaded to the fenders with farm produce roared by and its driver waved. The fourth car stopped.

"May as well ride, buddy."

He came close, restraining an impulse to click his heels. "Thank you," he said to the dark, slender man behind the wheel of the dusty sedan. He got in and the car started.

"Going far?" The driver was deeply tanned, almost swarthy. He wore a bandanna about his throat and on his black hair was a wide-brimmed hat. His trousers, the fugitive noted, were stuck into high-heeled riding boots. A cowboy, apparently, an American cowboy like the ones in the silly cinemas that used to be shown in Germany before the Leader came to power.

"To Connoton," the man of the Luftwaffe answered. Connoton was the border town.

He continued to study his companion surreptitiously. The fellow's skin was naturally dark, he now noted; sun tan alone did not account for its coppery shade. The high cheekbones, the strong nose—

All at once his eyes froze in their sockets, his glance riveted upon the driver's right hand as it gripped the wheel. It was a slender, muscular hand, smooth and almost hairless, and upon its third finger was a ring.

The ring seemed of silver and it carried a signet. It was the signet that was so rigidly arresting. Upon it was the emblem of the swastika.

"Riley Grannan's Last Adventure"

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AT first the fugitive thought he had made a mistake, but when he looked closer he saw he had not. The swastika on the ring was clear and unmistakable.

A light shone within his mind and he knew elation. Here was a friend in an enemy land. Why else the swastika? He realized now that his companion was an Indian and he recalled what Goebbels had said about minority races in America — that there was defection among them, that many favored the New Order. It was true then. The swastika proved it.

"That is a beautiful ring you are wearing," he said.

"It is a gift," his companion replied.

"A gift?"

"From my father."

"Ah." Here was final proof. The defection was general among the tribesmen. The swastika could mean nothing else. All Germans knew it was the symbol of but one thing. He gazed down at it again. It glittered in the sun as the driver turned the car into a service station. . . *Yah,* Herr Goebbels knew everything.

"Your father must be a wise man," said the young Nazi tentatively, casting about for a method of identifying himself. An officer in the Luftwaffe should fare well here among these wearers of the swastika in this broad, sunlit land.

"Plenty smart."

"A chief, I presume."

"Why not?"

"Of what tribe?"

"Apache." The young Indian grinned as a red-haired man came from the gas station. "All you can spare for an A-ticket, Sam," he called.

"Sure, Pete." Laughing, the red-haired man went behind the car and there followed the sound of the hose-nozzle in the tank.

Now was the moment. The fugitive spoke softly. "I also salute the swastika," he said. "I have served our Leader in the field."

"Is that a fact?" His companion twisted in his seat, staring.

"I am Richard von Gunde—*Kapitan*—"

"A captain?"

"Yes. In the Luftwaffe. The swastika on your ring—"

"Ah-h-h." The Indian sat up straight, his black eyes alight and boring into those of the escaped man. "From one of these camps?"

"True. I outwitted then easily. It was—"

The red-haired one spoke conversationally. "You goin' to the reservation school, Pete?" He was at the side of the car.

Absently, Pete answered. "Yeh. Due at nine. Got a new bunch of young punks starting class today. Sometimes I wonder why I ever went to Carlisle." He fished in a pocket and come out with money and a ration book. Handing it over, he said casually, "You still a deputy sheriff, Sam?"

"Was yesterday," said Sam.

"Then pinch this mug, pronto. I've just found out he's wanted. He's a kraut from a prison camp, a captain."

The cold blue eyes of the red-haired man focused calmly on Richard von Gunde, who tried to laugh. "But surely you know I joked—"

"Maybe so," Pete said. "If so, we'll find out. One thing's clear: You don't know much about swastikas. This one my old man gave me has been in our tribe for years, and it goes back a long way beyond that. It's different from the one Hitler stole from the Greeks. You see, our American swastika marches to the left while yours walks to the right. They move in opposite directions, and always will."

Grinning, the red-haired man said, "I'll just ride into town with you, Pete. Sheriff can bring me back. Guess I don't need no gun." He got into the rear seat.

The car started and Pete said casually, "Tell us some of your adventures in the war, captain. I get tired listening to my old man lie about campaigning with Geronimo."

But now *Herr Kapitan* Richard von Gunde refused to answer. It was beginning to dawn on him that Americans were all alike. They joked about everything—even when they were in deadly earnest, as now.

(Continued from page 8)

Naturally, some of them get hurt. About the first thing that happens when you get a good jolt of electricity, is that you stop breathing. Unless breathing is started again by artificial means—and quickly—you don't come out of it.

When a lineman gets shocked, he's usually working in the air some distance above ground. For years the proper procedure was for his buddies to climb up, rig up a rope and lower him to the ground. That took from two to ten minutes, according to where he was, how near help was, and how long it took to get him off the wires. Artificial respiration was given to him as soon as he reached the ground by what was called the prone method—the same as used on drowned persons.

The procedure wasn't very efficient. Statistics showed that very few men were revived by artificial respiration if there had been a material time-lapse in applying it. In fact, if a lineman working on a pole received enough of a jolt to render him unconscious, he very seldom recovered.

Then some safety engineer got the idea of giving a man artificial respiration while he was still on the pole. Which isn't as easy as it sounds. You can't press on the victim's back as you do in the prone method when you're hanging fifty feet in the air, for there is no flat surface to restrain his abdomen and therefore no pressure from the rear can push the air out of his lungs. But it was found that by *pulling* in and up on the abdomen from behind air could be forced from the lungs, thus making it possible for one lineman to work on another on a pole, saving all-important minutes.

An Eastern company (the Duquesne Light Co.) experimented with the new idea for some time, finally perfecting and adopting a workable rescue plan, which has since been adopted by many of the electric companies over the country. The method is simple. When a lineman gets into a "hot" circuit, one of his fellow workers releases him as soon as possible. The rescuer fastens his own safety around the pole then pulls the victim down astraddle the safety with his back to the rescuer. The rescuer then reaches under the victim's arms, places his hands, fingers touching, just under the ribs on the abdomen and pulls back and up, applying and releasing the pressure 12 to 15 times per minute.

They call it the "pole-top method" of resuscitation. In the comparatively short time it has been in practice, it's saved a lot of lives that formerly would have been lost. And the credit goes to that hard-working, resourceful group of men, the safety engineers, whose business it is to save lives.

They call it the "pole-top" method of resuscitation

Must be a nice feeling, in these days of wholesale slaughter, to be in that kind of business!

IT'S no surprise to find John Alden Knight on our contents page with a piece of fiction. Anglers are incorrigible tale-tellers as anyone knows and Jack's no exception. What did startle us was that he broke out of his *Ask Adventure* niche with a duck-shooting yarn instead of a fish story. If "From the Up-Wind Side" had been about salmon or trout or muskies we'd never have batted an eye. But teal, mallards, broadbill— We didn't get over the shock till we were half through the story. And by that time we'd decided that Jack could forsake fish for duck any time he got the urge. In fiction, we mean. Our fresh-water angling expert is still doing business at the same old stand in the *A.A.* department.—K.S.W.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

A HOPPERDOZER for the lubber.

Query:—Two or three years ago I noticed in a sporting goods store window what I believe were locusts; at least, they were what looked to be grasshoppers but so big that I said, "There ain't no sich animal."

I have been seriously considering whether or not it would be possible, after the war, to import these, dried, to put up in cellophane boxes and retail to fishermen. What I would like to know, if you have the information and the time, is--

1. Are these a sufficiently great pest in any of the parts of the United States or Canada that they may be caught in any quantities by natives of the region, and if so, by what method.

2. If not in the United States or Canada, in what part of the North African coast on the Mediterranean and what part of South Africa are they most prevalent?

3. If they were killed via the cyanide method, would they stand shipment, etc., without smelling to high heaven. I don't seem to remember any of the bugs, etc. we caught and killed at High School by that method ever getting strong.

—A. C. Beattie,
103 Springdale Blvd.,
Toronto, Ont.

Reply by S. W. Frost:—You probably refer to the lubber grasshopper (Brachystola magna) which is a large species without well-developed wings. It is common in the central portion of North America. It is abundant in western United States and no doubt would be found abundant in western Canada. However, I believe that smaller grasshoppers would be better for bait. I have seen dried grasshoppers as well as other dried insects put up in small packages as fish bait.

The lubber grasshopper as well as other species of grasshoppers could be caught in moderate numbers with a sweeping net. Such a net is made of unbleached muslin and a ring about twelve or fourteen inches in diameter. In using such a net it is swept swiftly back and forth in front of the operator. With a little practice, you can catch grasshoppers in considerable numbers in this manner. Grasshoppers are more numerous during the middle or towards the end of the summer and collecting would be more profitable at these times.

A hopperdozer could be used to collect grasshoppers in large numbers. This is a simple machine devised by farmers to control grasshoppers. It consists of a shallow box or pan approximately eight feet long, eleven inches wide and two inches deep. Along the broad side a baffle of muslin is placed. The dozer is mounted on skids or small wheels and is pulled across an infested field. The pan is filled with water on which a small amount of oil is floated. The grasshoppers are trapped in the pan as they jump against the baffle and fall in the pan. In your case the oil would have to be dispensed with as it would spoil the specimens. Any bulletin on the control of grasshoppers would give you further information for making a hopperdozer.

Insects are generally preserved only by allowing them to dry. Of course, a great quantity of grasshoppers should not be placed together until they have been dried in the sun for about twenty-four hours. Artificial driers might be used.

I think you will find that grasshoppers are comparatively easy to catch. You will be doing the farmers a good turn by relieving them of some of their misery. Dried grasshoppers also form good food for tropical fish. Trust you will have luck with your project.

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices that have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past, please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure*.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure*.

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

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The author states the time has come for this long hidden system to be disclosed to the Western world, and offers to send his amazing 9000-word treatise—which reveals many startling results—to sincere readers of this publication, free of cost or obligation. For your free copy, address the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 523-F, Los Angeles 4, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

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Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

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Aviation: *Airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

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Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edward High School, Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Marine Corps—MAJOR F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Navy—LIEUTENANT DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★**New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Ingle Nook," 39 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, T. H.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

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Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

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Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. **4** New Jersey—F. H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*— HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure*. **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Albert R. Gately—the best pal I ever had —was last heard from in Missouri. I would like to locate him. Anyone knowing his whereabouts write Morton A. Richard, 1213 N. 24 St., Phoenix, Ariz.

Louis Sixt, probably known as Bob Six, last heard of in Gananoque, Ont. and Vancouver, B. C. Age about 26, height 4′ 10″, weight 135 lbs., gray eyes, back-brushed straight brown hair. Scrapper, gambler, seafaring man. Anyone having knowledge of his whereabouts please write his brother Paul Sixt, c/o *Adventure*.

Max Kennison Todd, please communicate with your grandson, Donald Todd, Rt. 13, Box 781 A, Houston, Texas.

Would appreciate any information regarding James Eischeid, native of Iowa. He is my father and have not heard from him for fore than 15 years. He has mechanical engineering training and is also interested in aviation. Also has a decided lust for travel. Any clue to his whereabouts would be of great value to me. Please address any information to Cpl. E. D. Eischeid, USMC, H & S Btry.-9th Def. Bn.-F.M.F., c/o The Fleet Postoffice, San Francisco, Calif.

Leroy "Jack" Miles, age 21, height 5′ 10½″, weight 145 lbs. Eyes brown with inflamed iris; hair-sandy; complexion bronzed and freckled. Last heard of June 5, 1942 at Santa Fe, New Mexico. His home was originally at Hereford, Texas, but cannot be located. Please notify Rexford C. Miles, Box 389, Morenci, Arizona.

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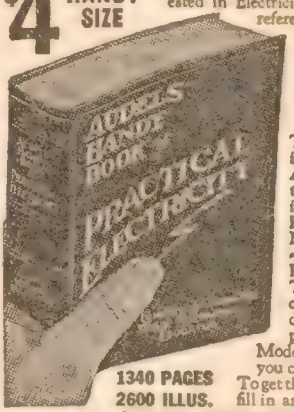

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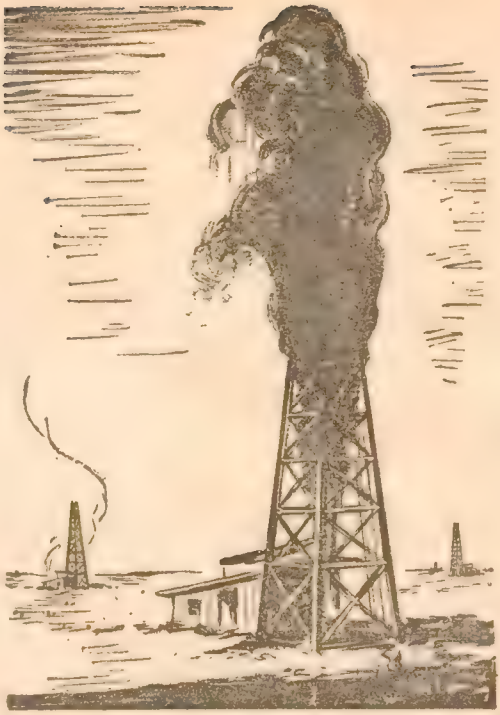

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(Continued from page 85)

He threw open the breech, dropped in the two shells, closed the gun and pointed it at the surprised Ed.

"All right, Ed," he said. "Get 'em up!"

"Hey, for God's sake," said Ed. "Look out where you're pointin' that gun! You gone crazy?"

"Crazy enough to know who shot Lou Owens. Got the evidence right here in my pocket. Now turn around and walk. Keep your paws up. If you try any monkey-business, so help me God, I'll cut you in half with this gun. You know what a twelve-gauge can do at close range. Now walk!"

"Mark right. Single," whispered Cap'n Willie.

"Your bird," I said to Harvey.

The little broadbill drake, coming up-wind, set his wings for a moment as though to decoy. Then, as Harvey stood up, he flared and towered straight up into the wind. Harvey swung his gun up and ahead of the duck and pulled the trigger. The broadbill drake folded up and dropped into the decoys.

Harvey stood and looked at the duck with a smile of satisfaction spreading over his face.

"There, by damn!" he announced. "That's one towering bird I didn't shoot under."

"What happened to Ed?" I asked.

"Oh, him. He's in the pen. They found his fingerprints on the empty yellow shell and he confessed. Said he shot in self-defense, so they gave him twenty years. Cigarette?"

"Thanks," I said. "Why didn't Bill turn in that empty shell the day he found it?"

Harvey chuckled. "I asked him about that," he said. "Bill said he wanted to win Mildred fair and square if he could. Figured he'd win out sooner or later, as soon as Ed's yellow streak showed up. She's made a good little wife for him, too. They got a couple of kids of their own now. Bill's pretty thorough—thinks things out and does 'em right. That's why he makes a good game warden. Also, my boy, that's why he flared that rick of ducks from the up-wind side."

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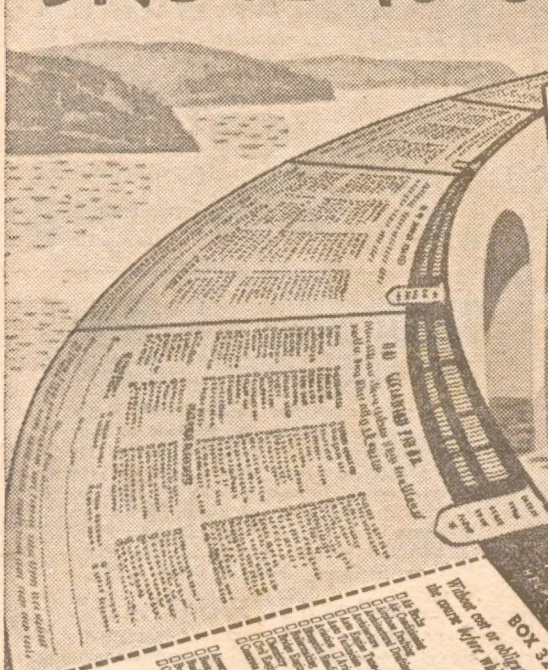

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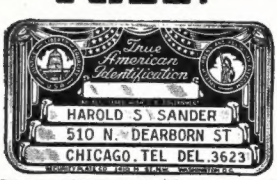

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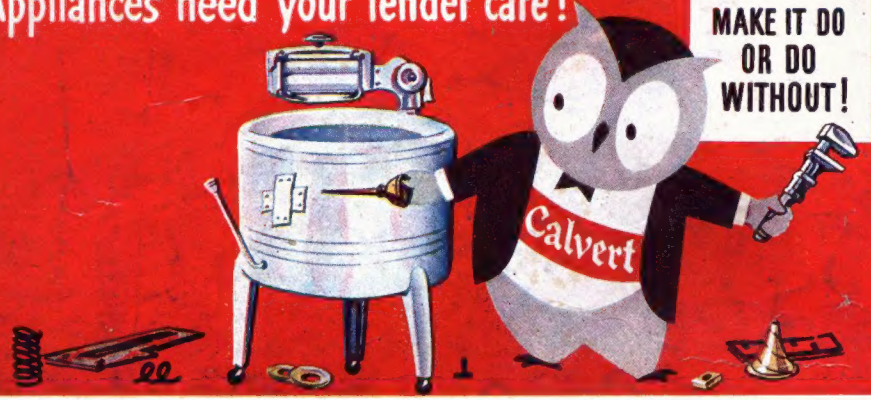

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